

Beyond the Kitchen

Muslim Women on Balancing Life, Family and Work

Huda Khattab

Other books by Huda Khattab:

- *Stories from the Muslim World*
- *The Muslim Woman's Handbook*
- *Bent Rib: A Journey through Women's Issues in Islam*

Translations:

- *Madinan Society at the time of the Prophet*
- *Signs before the Day of Judgement*
- *Isra' and Mi'raaj*
- *You can be the Happiest Woman in the World*

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Foreword

When a friend with children re-entered the workforce after nearly a decade at home, she called to tell me she was finding it hard to juggle home/work obligations. Having just finished the draft manuscript of *Beyond The Kitchen: Muslim Women on Balancing Life, Family and Work*, I was able to assure her that she was dealing with the juggle faced by countless women (and men) in today's world. (Let's also remember that there are those that must deal with work/life issues under the added traumas of living under occupation, in a war zone or under extreme poverty).

Each woman may think she is the only one struggling to balance work and family and home life, but it turns out that these difficulties are common to all of us in the modern world. Moreover, the "work-life balance", as it is termed in the academic world, is an issue known to governments and researchers.

The Canadian government has sponsored research into the "work-life balance" over the past several years. Professors Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins have authored two reports based on a large study conducted in 2001 and sponsored by Health Canada.¹ They have identified something called the "work-life conflict," the sense we all have of "having too much to do and too little time to do it."² Work-life conflict is where the responsibilities of work and personal life cannot be balanced out, leading to discord.

Duxbury and Higgins found that the number of working Canadians reporting a high level of overload increased during the 1990s from 47% to 59%.³ In another report, for the Canadian Policy Research Network, they found that 70% of those who spent more than 45 hours per week in paid work reported feeling overloaded by the total demands on their time and energy, and 60% reported that work made it

difficult to fulfill family responsibilities. ⁴

Work-life conflict has several consequences ranging from increased job strain, to health and mental health stresses, to reduced productivity in the economy; hence governments' and business' interests in attempting to alleviate it. The Canadian government maintains a website devoted to this issue, and countries such as the UK, New Zealand and Australia have introduced legislation that aims to improve the work-life conflict.⁵

So Muslims are not unique in facing these work-life issues. There is not an "Islamic" version of the work-life balance that is different from others. We all, Muslim or not, have to feed, clean, and clothe the kids, deal with homework, housework and bedtime, as well as work: managers, supervisors and productivity.

But being Muslim in a secular society does bring another dimension to the work-life balance (one that would also be common to members of other faith traditions), for not only do we have to deal with these documented issues of the work-life balance, we have also to deal with aspects relating to our Islam.

It is related in the Sahih of Imam Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (upon him be peace) said:

"Allah the Almighty is pure and accepts only that which is pure. Allah has commanded the faithful to do that which He commanded the Messengers, and the Almighty has said: 'O Messengers! Eat of the pure things and do right'. And Allah the Almighty has said: 'O you who believe! Eat of the pure things We have provided you.'

Then he mentioned [the case of] a man who, having journeyed far, is dishevelled and dusty and who spreads out his hands to the heavens [saying]: "O Lord! O Lord!" —while his food is unlawful,

his drink unlawful, his clothing unlawful, and he is nourished unlawfully, so how can he be answered!"

We have to balance our need to work with our obligation to live a lifestyle in conformity with what Allah (swt) has laid down for us: we need to find time to pray, read the Qur'an regularly, learn the du'a' for every occasion; we need to devote time to encouraging good moral characteristics in ourselves and our children, such as avoiding alcohol, dating, lying, cheating, arrogance, gossip and teasing; and being kind, forgiving, generous, sharing and so on. So, Muslims also face Islam-work balance issues: finding time and a proper place to pray; observing hijab; avoiding alcohol, flirtatious male-female interaction, gossip, lying, politicking, and the like.

All these dimensions of the work-life conflict, from the across-the-board "how do you feed the kids dinner when you've walked in the door from work at 6.00 pm?" to the Islamic-related "should you attend the office Christmas party?" are covered in Huda Khattab's outstanding book, *Beyond The Kitchen: Muslim women on Balancing Life, Family and Work*.

Based on surveys and interviews with Muslim women, Huda Khattab brings us together as a community of women, struggling with all these issues. When my friend called to discuss her worries about the home/work juggle she faced, I was able to share with her some tips I had gleaned from this book. While it is not intended as a 'how-to' book, I am sure that anyone who reads this book, will come away enriched. Huda Khattab offers us an insight into the lives of many Muslim women, giving voice to their struggles, challenges and achievements. At the very least, to know that one is not alone is comfort enough, but *Beyond The Kitchen: Muslim Women on Balancing Life, Family and Work* provides more than that, it connects us together, like an extended family

that listens and supports its members during the journey of life.

Katherine Bullock, PhD

Author, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*

Introduction

This is a very personal book. It grew out of my own explorations of women's role in Islam and in society and out of my concern for my daughters and their future lives and careers in a world that can be bewildering at the best of times.

When I became Muslim, the general impression that I was given was that women were to stay at home and raise children. Lessons in the mosque and the content of most books and pamphlets on "Women in Islam" that were handed to me reinforced this idea that women's place was in the home. I rarely met any Muslim women living permanently in the west who were actually working, but with hindsight I believe that this may have been because they were too busy with their work and families to attend many activities in the mosque or socialize with young converts. At the same time, as a student I met many young Muslim women who had been sent to the west to study on scholarships from their home countries. These women who were doing degrees in accountancy and science, or studying for PhDs so that they could teach in their home universities, were obviously expected to work when they returned home, not only stay at home and be wives and mothers.

It was all quite baffling for a young English woman who had grown up surrounded by working women. Many of them were civil servants, but I also knew women who ran their own or their family's businesses such as "corner shops" (small convenience stores) and market gardens. These women were also active in the local community, serving on parent-teacher committees in local schools, teaching Sunday School, participating in local horticultural society events, and so on.

The path of spiritual seeking that brought me to Tawheed was pursued more through books and reading than interacting with Muslims on a large scale, and apart from idealistic notions embodied in the books, the social ramifications were far from my mind at that point. So I was initially disconcerted to find a community where social expectations for women often appeared to be quite different from what I knew and was used to.

As time went by, I realized that there are different strands within the Muslim community, with a host of different views and opinions on just about everything, not just women's issues. But there are still certain limitations, some of which are purely cultural and others which are rooted in Islamic teachings and mores.

Although Islamic teachings indicate that a woman's primary realm is the home, it is clear from the earliest sources that their role has never been restricted solely to the domestic sphere. But there is still the concern that in some quarters women and girls are prevented from ever reaching their full potential, and other concerns about women being able to access services provided by other women in fields ranging from medical to cosmetic.

Now I am a mother and I have daughters who are growing up. Issues concerning girls' education and career aspirations are front and centre in my life on a daily basis at present. Discussions about what to be "when they grow up" have been a frequent occurrence for several years, and it was concern for my girls' future that led me to undertake this research initially. As my research progressed, I found that Muslim women are engaged in a wide range of jobs and careers, interacting with the world within Islamic parameters, contributing to society and providing a broad range of much needed services.

So this book serves two purposes: I hope it will provide guidelines for Muslim women and girls who are interested

in the world of work beyond the domestic realm; it is also a celebration of the diversity of interest and skills to be found among Muslim women.

I pray that Allah will accept this work and cause it to be of benefit to readers, and forgive me for any mistakes contained therein.

Huda Khattab

PART ONE

Can a Muslim woman be a working woman?

Is a Muslim woman allowed to work outside the home, or in the labour force? Isn't a woman's place in the home, pregnant, barefoot and in the kitchen?

These ideas may prevail among certain sections of the Muslim community, and they also enjoy currency as stereotypes of Muslim women in the broader world community, but a closer look at the Muslim community and its history will show a different picture.

If we go back to our "Golden Age" – the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs - we will see that Muslim women have always worked. Of course it was not the kind of work that is done Monday to Friday, nine till five with regular salary and benefits that comes to mind when we think of "work" nowadays. It was more along the lines of the pre-industrial, homesteading, cottage-industry life that is a distant memory for many of us who live in cities, but is still a reality for many rural women worldwide even today. Women did tasks that went beyond the merely domestic. The hadeeth literature refers to women doing typical daily domestic tasks, such as baking bread and sweeping the house – but let us not forget that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would lend a hand with such tasks. However, the earliest Muslim women also acquired and practised other skills for which they became known and which took them beyond the home to interact with and contribute to society.

Examples from early history

Examples of Muslim women in the early years of Islam doing "jobs" beyond the domestic are numerous. I shall mention only a few.

- *Business and trade in the marketplace and beyond*

Khadeejah is the most well known example of a businesswoman. She was a noble and wealthy Makkan woman who engaged in trade with Syria. Although she hired men to travel on her behalf, she is the one who financed the business and directed it, and her caravan was equal to the caravan sent out by Quraysh as a whole.⁶

Whilst Khadeejah relied on hired men to ply her trade, other women would sell their products in the markets themselves.

Hind bint 'Utbah was a noble woman of Quraysh whose husband was Abu Sufyaan. When Abu Sufyaan divorced her, she asked 'Umar for a loan of four thousand dirhams from the bayt al-maal, then she went out to the land of Kalb where she bought and sold.⁷

In his *Tabaqat*, Ibn Sa'd mentions a number of other early Muslim women who engaged in trade, such as Qayla Umm Bani 'Anmar, who approached the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and asked for his advice about how to make and accept offers when buying and selling.⁸

Asma' bint Mukharraba ibn Jandal of Tameem had a son, 'Abd-Allah ibn Rabee'ah, who used to send her perfume from Yemen during the caliphate of 'Umar, and she used to sell it.⁹

In an interesting vignette, it is reported from 'Amra bint al-Tubakh that she went to the market with her slave woman and bought a fish that was so big that its head and

tail appeared from the basket in which she carried it. 'Ali passed by and asked how much it had cost, commenting that it would feed her family well.¹⁰

So we can see that, unlike the situation in many communities today, the early Muslim community did not believe that a woman's presence in the marketplace as either vendor or consumer compromised her modesty.

- *Working with Animals*

Asma' described in detail how she cared for her husband al-Zubayr's horse and camel, bringing food and water for them and grooming the horse. Although it was not a task that she enjoyed – her relief when her father Abu Bakr provided her with a servant who could take over this job was great indeed ("it was as if he freed me from slavery")¹¹ – this serves as an example of a Muslim woman doing a job that took her outside the home on a regular basis.

- *Agriculture*

It is known that the earliest Muslim women owned date palm trees, gardens etc, which they tended themselves. A report in *Saheeh Muslim*, in the Book of Divorce, states that a woman is allowed to go out to do her work even during the 'iddah period following divorce, when certain restrictions are imposed on a woman's conduct and movements:

Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allah said: My maternal aunt was divorced and she wanted to harvest her date palms. A man rebuked her for going out, so she went to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and he said: "No, go and harvest your date palms, for perhaps you will give charity or do an act of kindness."¹²

In *Saheeh al-Bukhari* there is a report from Sahl ibn Sa'd which mentions a woman who had her own fields, where

she used to grow beetroot. Sahl and other Companions used to visit her on Fridays when she would offer them a meal of beetroot and barley.¹³

• Medicine

The fact that women accompanied the Muslim armies so that they could tend the wounded is well known. When Sa'd ibn Mu'adh was wounded at the Battle of al-Khandaq (the Ditch), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ordered that he be placed in the tent of Rufaydah, who is sometimes described as the first female doctor in Islam. Rufaydah was a woman from the Aslam tribe who had set up a tent in the mosque, where she nursed the wounded and tended anyone who needed medical care.¹⁴

In common with all traditional societies, it was women who attended births in early Muslim society. In one notable instance, it was the wife of the caliph himself who attended a birth. During one of his famous patrols of Madeenah, 'Umar heard the cries of a woman in labour coming from the tent of some travelers. He found out from the woman's husband that she had no one to attend her, so he went and brought his own wife, Umm Kalthoom bint 'Ali, to assist the woman in labour whilst he prepared some food, which he sent to the woman first, before giving some to the man.¹⁵

• Literature

The foremost form of literature in Arabia at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was poetry, and both men and women were poets. Tumaadir bint 'Amr, better known as al-Khansa' (lit. "the snub-nosed one") was a noted poetess, whose brothers died in tribal wars before Islam; she composed eulogies for them, as was customary, for which she became famous. After she

converted to Islam, she sent four of her sons into battle at al-Qaadisiyah, exhorting them to fight in the most eloquent terms. All four were slain, and she responded with expressions of firm faith, hoping to be reunited with them in Paradise.¹⁶

• Handicrafts

Sawdah, the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was well known as an expert in the tanning of leather. Another of his wives, Zaynab, was well known for her generosity; as is mentioned in *Saheeh Muslim*, she used to work with her hands and give the wealth that she earned in charity.¹⁷

• Female scholarship

The splendid tradition of female scholarship endured for many centuries in the Muslim world. The history of such scholarship, particularly with regard to the study of hadeeth, but also including calligraphy, poetry and knowledge of the Arabic language, is discussed in a well known paper by Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi which was originally published as an appendix entitled "Women Scholars of Hadith" at the conclusion of his book *Hadith Literature*, (the Islamic Texts Society, 1993), and has since been reproduced on numerous Muslim websites.

'Aa'ishah, Hafsa, Umm Salamah and other wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), along with female Sahaabah such as Umm al-Darda', are well known for their deep knowledge and the role they played in the transmission of hadeeth. What may be less well known, perhaps, is that this tradition of female scholarship lasted throughout the time of the Taabi'een, the era when the major collections of hadeeth were compiled and until

the ninth century AH (fifteenth century CE). Male and female scholars worked together to acquire, preserve and transmit knowledge.¹⁸

In 2007 there was a flurry of interest about research on the female scholarly tradition of Islam. Mohammad Akram Nadwi, a scholar at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in England, announced the results of an eight-year study of female hadeeth scholars. According to a report in the *New York Times*¹⁹, he had expected to find "twenty or thirty" women. Instead he found eight thousand and the biographical dictionary he has compiled, instead of being one volume as expected, runs to forty volumes in Arabic, listing female scholars from the earliest days of Islam to as late as the fifteenth (Gregorian) century. An English translation of his preface was published in 2007 (*Al-Muhaddithat – the Women Scholars in Islam*).

It is to be hoped that this tradition may be soundly revived and that women once again will take their place among the scholars of our ummah.

Muslim women in the modern world

Looking at our own times, our challenge is to apply Islamic ideals and teachings in every aspect of our own lives, which includes matters of work as well as worship. The issue of whether a woman should work depends on her own situation, inclinations and aspirations.

Home is our base, but not our prison

Although women's lives are to be primarily home based, even the strictest of jurists still say that we are allowed to go out for our needs, which include education, medical treatment, work and so on. It is often argued that the practice of purdah or complete seclusion of women is the

privilege of the upper classes; women of other classes – the majority of women – have always had to work, in the fields or elsewhere.

The ummah is in a state of decline, if not crisis. We are in a situation where we need “all hands on deck” and we cannot relegate half of our community to the domestic realm only for their entire lifetimes. Yes, running a home is important, and raising children is important, and those who have children need to focus on them and their upbringing whilst they are growing. But as we shall see, not every woman gets to be a wife and mother, and even the most devoted mother will probably spend a couple of decades at most as a full-time “hands-on” mother. What is a woman to do before marriage and children, and after the children have grown up? What if a woman never gets married? What if the breadwinner dies and she is left to raise her family alone? What if a woman is the only one in her family who can earn a living to put bread on the table? One of the sisters I contacted for my research is unmarried; both of her parents are unable to work for medical reasons, and she has no brothers – as the eldest sister she carries the heavy burden of having to work in order to support her parents and her younger sisters.

Be realistic

Of course the Islamic ideal is that of an extended family whose members will support one another. Ideally a woman could be supported by her father or brother or uncle if she is not married or if she ends up widowed or divorced, and she would not then have to work in order to survive. But it is no secret that the world we live in is far from ideal. The extended family has broken down in many cases, and not everyone takes their Islamic duties seriously. War and natural disasters take their toll constantly. Immigrant

and refugee women may find themselves in foreign lands with no means of support. Women who convert to Islam may find themselves cut off by disapproving families and lacking in support from the local Muslim community, due to racism, indifference or the preoccupation of an immigrant community with its own issues. Man's inhumanity to man (and woman) is well known, and there are too many stories of women who have been cruelly divorced and left to fend for themselves, with or without children.

Even if none of these things happen, and a woman finds herself happily married with children, she may still find herself needing to work. In some countries the cost of living is so high that the "double income" is necessary, not in order to have a posh house and fancy car, but just to live an average lifestyle and send your children to decent schools – or in the case of Muslims living in the west where the moral environment of the public school system is often a concern, to put the children in Islamic or private schools. If her husband is studying for a certain career, such as medicine or academia, a woman may need to work to support the family until his career reaches a point where his earnings can support the family. In some cases the husband may start a business and need his wife's support in various ways – sometimes with book-keeping and secretarial skills, or helping out in the store, or whatever is needed.

Women need women

And we cannot forget that Muslim women need services of many kinds too, some of which are best provided by other women. Doctors and nurses spring to mind most readily, and if we as a community insist that our womenfolk be treated by women, we must be prepared to ensure that some of our women receive the requisite training.

Teaching is another profession that is cited as one for which

women are suited, which is true, and female teachers are certainly more appropriate for girls and young women. Although the ideal that is often presented is for mothers to stay home with their children when they are very small, in some cases – such as when the family is in financial need or when the mother can provide a service that the community needs (such as a doctor) – a woman may have to leave her little ones with someone else. Some women are able to find a family member (husband, mother, mother-in-law etc) to leave the children with, but those who do not have this option and need to go out to work when they have small children are always grateful to find fellow Muslim women who offer day-care and babysitting – which in turn is an attractive option for women who want to find a home-based job and love children.

And there are plenty of other services that we need, from the serious (counsellors and mental health professionals) to the apparently frivolous such as hairdressers, aestheticians and dressmakers. They are only “apparently” frivolous because everyone needs a decent haircut once in a while, and the problem of finding decent hijab-type clothes in the current fashion climate is a serious one, which is compounded for women who are taller or larger than the “average”. Many sisters can only get suitable clothes by using the services of a seamstress.

For all of these reasons – as well as those discussed by the women I contacted whilst researching this book, such as self-fulfilment and the desire to contribute to society – it is safe to say that it is only wise for Muslim girls and women to be prepared for work. This means that Muslim girls and women need to be educated, and beyond that they need skills and knowledge to deal with day to day life, whether they choose to be stay-at-home wives and moms or to enter the world of work (or both). Raising children is hard work these days and mothers need at least the very basics of

knowledge so that they can be the first madrasah or school for their children. Beyond that they need to be prepared and have skills that they can use to earn a living and/or make a contribution to society.

Islamic parameters

Islam attaches conditions to work for both men and women. Any job or career must, first of all, be permissible. Thus jobs that involve things that are obviously haram are not options for Muslims, such as working in casinos or bars, or in the preparation and sale of pork and alcohol, etc. Another area which Muslims should steer clear of is *riba* (usury or interest), as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) not only warned against it, he actually cursed not only those who engage in *riba* but anyone who assists the transaction in any way.

In line with teachings on hijab and moral conduct, scholars have also identified other guidelines to which Muslim women should pay attention when seeking work:

Hijab. Women should wear proper hijab when outside the home or meeting with non-mahram males. Hijab means covering the head and body with long, loose, non-see-through clothing that covers the shape of the body, especially the area between the navel and the knees. This is the bare minimum that is required. Hijab also means no makeup and no perfume in public. Within these guidelines there is plenty of room for personal choice, the dictates of the climate, and even fashion, within reasonable limits. Many Muslim women in jobs where uniforms or specific dress codes are required have been able to work out a "hijabi version" that meets the requirements of both their faith and their workplaces.

Avoiding free-mixing. The restrictions on free-mixing between the sexes apply to both men and women. Many scholars place a particular emphasis on women avoiding mixed work-places as much as possible. It is well known that in some offices and other workplaces unacceptable interactions between men and women are commonplace, ranging from "mild" flirting (regarded as innocuous by many non-Muslims but unacceptable in Islamic terms) to sexual harassment. Muslim women seeking work should look for jobs with the minimum of mixing and workplaces infused with a culture of respect between the sexes. It is also essential to maintain a sense of decorum and keep all interactions with men businesslike and focused on the work, and not overstep the mark in socializing.

Choosing suitable work. Particular emphasis is placed on choosing jobs that are suited to women's nature – so nurturing careers such as teaching, nursing and social work are often touted as ideal jobs for women. Areas where same-sex service providers are often sought are other careers that women should consider – such as medicine, counselling, fitness instructors, hairdressers, etc.

A woman's likely role as wife and mother should also be borne in mind, so women and girls should think of jobs with flexible hours and types of work that can be done from home (sewing, crafts, telecommuting, consultancy services). For those with aspirations of a full-fledged career, it is important to make sure that a break of a few months or a year or two will not affect one's prospects.

For women who are already married and have children, a balance must be struck between duties to family and work. The work should not prevent her from caring for her family properly. If it does, it is time to sit down and reassess the situation. Taking a break from work, reducing one's hours, changing to a less pressured job, hiring help and training

family members to help out are all options which can help with this dilemma.

What can't a Muslim woman do?

The question of what a Muslim woman can't do also needs to be addressed. Obvious and extreme examples would include working in a bar, nightclub, casino or other gambling establishment, even if it is "only" as a receptionist or cleaner; working as a dancer, singer or entertainer; selling drugs etc. Fortune-telling (including astrology and horoscopes) and witchcraft, which in some cultures and some regions are things that are done by women in return for payment, are also haram.

Perhaps less obvious would be working in a "mainstream" bank (the *riba* issue) or financial company, the insurance industry; working in a restaurant that serves pork and alcohol; working in a store that sells pork and alcohol etc; selling lottery tickets and cigarettes.

Basically, if it is haram to do something, it is haram to work with it or sell it or make money from it. Of course these rules apply to men as much as women.

What kind of work?

You have decided that you want to work, you could use the money, you feel – or, even better, you know – that you have something to offer ... what to do? You may have a clear-cut qualification which will take you into a certain field, such as medicine. But if your path is not so clearly mapped out, it's time for you to blaze your own trail. Think about what skills you already have, what hobbies and crafts you enjoy or would like to try, what the community needs, which fields are expanding, where you can carve a niche for yourself. Among the women I interviewed were entrepreneurs who

saw gaps in the market and filled them; one makes and sells hijab pins and another sells oils and takes small groups on tours of her husband's country.

It is also worth considering kinds of work that can be pursued from home. When I started researching this book, I met an Indian Muslim woman who was an artist. She told me that her father had raised all his daughters to be educated women and to aspire to careers, with the proviso that their work be something that could be done at home, and they were all pursuing successful home-based careers. Think outside the box. You don't have to commute downtown and work from nine till five every weekday. Think of working from home, freelancing, telecommuting or setting up your own business. Several of my respondents are freelancers and consultants, and some telecommute, doing work for clients in other cities and other countries via phone and e-mail.

Whilst considering home-based work, it must be noted that the kind of work that consists of stuffing envelopes or fixing small trinkets to cards should be avoided. These are usually scams and/or poorly-paid tasks. Any newspaper or internet ad which promises that you can make "thousands per month easily from home!!!" should be regarded with suspicion. Multi-level marketing, "pyramid" schemes and any program that promises maximum riches for the minimum of effort should also be ignored. If it sounds too good to be true, that is most likely to be the case. We should beware of those who seek to exploit women and make sure that our choices of work are suitable and sensible.

Mira Khattab (no relation to the author), a midwife and community activist in Ontario, Canada, strongly urges that that you assess your situation and your motives for working. She urges Muslim women to ignore the influences of modern society which looks down on housewives and stay-at-home mothers, and to ensure that the motives for

working are sound. There is a difference between financial necessity and the desire for conspicuous consumption:

"You have to know your strengths and weaknesses and act accordingly. This is the answer when it comes to the issue of working or not working. Meaning if you have enough energy, enough time, are very organized, are comfortable with this, then go ahead and do it. But if you are not, then don't drive yourself nuts and crazy just because it's 'the thing to do'. A lot of the time in this society we are told that if you are not working you are not worthy, you have to be working, get the dollars, to have value and worth. I'm telling you: Don't believe that. Your worth as a human being according to Allah's guidance, is not measured in dollar signs. [The idea that] if you serve your husband and children you're just a housewife, just at home, but if you serve coffee to your boss at work or copy papers for him then you are a worthwhile person – we should reject that, we know better because we are Muslims, we don't have to stumble in darkness because we know where we are coming from and where we are going. You have to know yourself, if you are comfortable with it, if your husband is accepting of it, go ahead and do it, but if you are going berserk and nothing is getting done, and you are flying here and there just to make a few dollars... you have to know yourself, don't compromise your family because that is where importance is, if you are working three jobs to have swimming pools and cars and big bank accounts but your children are losers at the end, how much have you really accomplished? You really have to evaluate that."

Thinking outside the box: looking for practical options

Rabia Khedr, a working mother and diversity consultant, notes that whilst wife and mother is the most likely role to which Muslim girls will aspire, and it is the norm, it is

important to also plan for a career. But she emphasizes the importance of planning for a career that will create balance and will allow one the best of both worlds. "Look for a career that will allow some measure of independence, rather than being chained to a desk from nine till five every day." She recommends looking for areas that are well known for offering part-time and flexible working schedules, or a career such as teaching which will fit in with a mother's schedule, as teachers get their holidays when the children do. Medicine, especially family medicine, and some areas of law where you can control your caseload, such as immigration law, are other areas that Rabia recommends for women. In some cases you may have to "pay your dues" by working to a more rigid schedule until you reach a level where you can become more flexible and set your own hours – examples include information technology and the financial sector, where some women have reached the level where they are able to set up on their own as consultants and work from home.

Another point to consider is looking for fields where interaction with men is less likely; making the right choice of career from the outset is less likely to lead to awkward issues arising later on. Mira advocates wisdom in "your choice of profession to start with. Choose a profession that doesn't have so much mixing of the sexes, where you are not alone with one man. Professions that are more attuned to women's strengths and responsibilities."

It may come as a shock to those Muslims who suffer from "Lawyer-Engineer-Doctor" syndrome, but Rabia also encourages Muslim girls and women to consider areas of work that are not held in such high esteem ("they're not white-collar") but which provide services that people need and which can be done from home, fitting in with the schedule of a wife and mother, such as sewing, hairdressing, baking, catering etc. A bonus offered by such work is that

it is not so emotionally draining as other careers may be, so the woman who does such jobs will have more energy to invest in her children.

To sum up, a Muslim woman can indeed be a working woman, but she must be smart in making her choice of work, bearing in mind Islamic guidelines and her own situation and family commitments. We should not be swayed by glamorous images of career women in the media or by exaggerated claims that a woman can "have it all." Rather she should seek to balance her work with other aspects of her life and her likely role as a wife and mother.

PART TWO

Muslim women and their work: what they do and why

Wanting to know what kind of work Muslim women are actually doing, and seeking potential role models for my daughters, I began to seek out working Muslim women. Starting with the printed word and the Internet, my exploration of the world of work among Muslim women led me to discover an impressive array of skills and talents, including a Saudi biotechnologist and an Afghan detective.

This discovery inspired me to seek out working Muslim women for myself, and ask them about their experiences as working Muslim women in the workplace. Looking around my own community and beyond, I found a diverse range of intelligent and talented women doing a wealth of fascinating and worthwhile jobs. Sensing that this was not limited to women of any particular background, I set out to discover what the "other half" of the ummah was doing.

Overview of survey

Questionnaires/requests for interviews were sent out over an eight-month period (May 2004-January 2005). Forty-two women were generous with their time and shared information on their working lives and experiences.

The respondents covered a broad range of careers, educational levels, ethnic backgrounds, geographical locations, ages and marital statuses.

Whilst the majority are married with children (women in this category had between 1 and 6 children), there are also

sisters who are unmarried, married with no children, and divorced – with or without children.

Educational level ranged from high school graduates (one of whom dropped out in grade 10 but went back to school as an adult and completed high school) to one woman who had done post-doctoral research. The majority had some post-secondary education.

Geographical location

The majority of respondents were located in North America, throughout Canada and the USA. There were also respondents in Europe (UK and Spain), Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and South Africa.

Ages

The ages of respondents ranged from 23 up to 57. The majority of respondents were in their 30s and 40s.

Ethnic backgrounds

Like a cross-section of the ummah, the respondents included born-Muslims and converts of a variety of ethnic backgrounds. When invited to describe their ethnic background, they self-identified as follows²⁰:

- o British (white)
- o Lebanese
- o American
- o East African Indian
- o Australian (white)
- o American (European)
- o Caucasian American
- o Canadian Pakistani/South Asian

- o American of Dutch, English and Russian background
- o Canadian/Egyptian parents
- o Scottish/British
- o Canadian/South Asian/Indian parents
- o Bosnian/Croatian
- o Caucasian American (Eastern European)
- o Canadian Egyptian
- o Native American & Irish
- o American/Portuguese
- o UK Indo-Caribbean (Trinidad & Tobago)
- o Canadian: English/Maltese - born in Malta
- o South African Asian Muslim (Father Asian, Mother Cape Malay)
- o French Canadian
- o India/Canada/raised in Saudi
- o Caucasian Canadian
- o White Canadian
- o Algerian
- o Canadian/Pakistani parents
- o Muslim Pakistani Canadian woman with a disability
- o Canadian of Greek Parentage
- o White English with Scots/Irish ancestors
- o Canadian with East African parents, Gujrati origins
- o Croatian
- o African American (several respondents)
- o Turkish

Working Muslim women cannot be pigeonholed on the basis of race. The academics included African-American, White (Canadian and Australian) and Arab sisters; the entrepreneurs included East African Indian, French Canadian and White American sisters. Muslim women come in all colours and ethnic varieties, and do all kinds of

work. What they have in common is Islam. It should also be noted that for some of the women I contacted, English is a second or third language. Any idiosyncrasies in quotations should therefore be overlooked.

Jobs and areas of work

A broad range of work areas were represented in the sample of women surveyed. They include the following, as described by the respondents themselves and grouped by myself into categories:

Publishing/Media

- o Writer
- o Editing/Proofreading
- o Islamic Media
- o Journalism (radio)

IT/Computers

- o Computer consulting
- o Education
- o Computer Science

Education

- o Teacher (Geography)
- o Education/tutor, assessor Early Years
- o Education/Lecturer
- o Teaching Assistant (Political Science)
- o Graduate Student/Teaching Assistant (Islamic Studies)
- o Teaching Assistant in Islamic school
- o Education/Islamic studies

Health/Medical

- o Preclinical Research (cancer therapy)

- o Family Doctor (GP)
- o Nursing
- o Nursing/midwifery
- o Dentist

Engineering

- o Transportation Engineering
- o Cost Engineer

Law

- o Lawyer

Science

- o Research Analyst (federal government post)

Community/Non-Profit

- o Fundraising
- o Diversity Consultant

Business/Administration

- o Business Administration
- o Marketing
- o University Admissions Officer
- o Finance Admin
- o Entrepreneur/Business Admin
- o Marketing/part-time clothing design and retail
- o Info Tech./Business Analyst
- o Admin.

Arts & Crafts

- o Leather workshop

Beauty

- o Manicurist/nail technician

Trail-blazers

Happily, I found a few creative women who could not easily be pigeonholed:

- o Housewife/Homeschooler/Dental Hygienist/Entrepreneur
- o Community Development/Academia/Writing
- o Importing Argan oil/organizing small travel groups
- o Graphic Artist/Farming

The ones that got away

During the course of my research, contact was briefly made with a number of women who were working in interesting fields, but unfortunately a number of factors (time constraints, shyness, rejected e-mails, wrong phone numbers, lack of voice mail, bizarre voice-mail messages that made me hope I had got a wrong number, and other technical glitches) meant that their stories must remain unheard for now, but hopefully not forever. The fields of work of which I had a tantalizing glimpse include:

- o Nuclear scientist
- o Social worker
- o Veterinary assistant
- o Artist/calligrapher
- o Non-profit sector worker
- o School bus driver
- o Court translator
- o Film-maker

Other jobs in which I have seen Muslim women working over the years, but was unable to make contact for the purposes of this study include:

- o Pharmacist
- o Real estate agent
- o Mail carrier
- o Bakery assistant
- o Retail clerks (in health food store, bookstore, etc)
- o Travel agent
- o First Aid instructor

A word about confidentiality

Some women felt shy about sharing their stories and requested anonymity. This has been respected and their names and identifying details are changed or omitted. In cases where it seems prudent to do so, names (real or otherwise) are omitted altogether, such as when referring to personal or marital problems spoken of by some respondents, that impacted on their working lives.

Inside or outside the home?

The jobs mentioned by respondents may be roughly divided into those that are primarily home-based and those that are based outside the home (some women with dual or plural roles do not fit so neatly into this categorization, of course). Although there is a widespread view that Muslim women's lives should be centred on the home, there are many needs that can only be met – such as the need for female doctors, nurses, teachers, etc – if some women step up to the challenge and work outside the home. As mentioned in Part One, work is one of the reasons for which, according to scholars, a woman may leave the home, subject to certain conditions such as observing correct Islamic dress (hijab) and the required code of conduct, which includes no undue mixing with the opposite sex. (In case readers are wondering, the same code of conduct applies to men too.)

Some women prefer to be home-based for the majority of the time, even if they work. Cultural dictates, family preferences and personal choice may all play a role. Other women cherish the time spent outside the home, making a positive contribution to society. Often women with young children will choose home-based work when the children are small so that they can be with them. On the other hand, some women choose to work outside the home, often part-time, when their children are tiny and relish the intellectual stimulation of grown-up conversation and the break from the sheer hard work of raising a small child. There is no one right way, no "one-size-fits-all" approach to work. The women I contacted fall into both categories, and some fall in between.

Home-based workers

The home-based sisters covered a number of areas, with publishing/media jobs featuring quite prominently. The writers were among the most enthusiastic questionnaire respondents, perhaps because it involved a medium in which they feel particularly at home. Most of the sisters in this group had training and/or work experience in other fields before getting involved in the writing and publishing fields.

Patricia, a writer with two published books and numerous articles to her credit, with more in the pipeline, had studied for a qualification in business studies, and was starting further studies when she began her family and a difficult first pregnancy put an end to her plans. While she was still at home, raising her family, she was asked "to edit some work for a UN officer and realized that my English was easily good enough to go into editing, and that I could do it from home so my children could still have the benefit of

having me around. Some friends started passing on work to me, and I began to learn what I needed to know to edit well. I never like to do anything by half measures! I gradually got into writing once I realized that I was much better at it than most of the people I was editing. That sounds pompous, but it's really not. The business is full of people who have no idea how to put their thoughts down on paper, and even less idea what is good English."

Lori started out training as a nurse, then switched to Executive Secretary training and excelled in the business field until she got married and had her first child. She now works freelance in editing and proofreading as a copy preparer and designer. Living in the Middle East, she initially thought that she would not have to work, but when a friend mentioned that a UN agency in the country was looking for a native English speaking proofreader, with hours that suited a mother with young children, she took the opportunity to re-enter the workforce. Internet contacts brought another part-time job working for a small monthly newspaper published in the UK, which Lori has combined with other freelance jobs since the UN agency for which she had been working relocated to another country.

Linda (Widad), founder of the Islamic Writers' Alliance (IWA) and author of the *Islamic Rose* series, was a Law Enforcement Officer for 24 years prior to her conversion, and has a Bachelor's degree in Business Management. Since retiring from law enforcement, she has become very active in the field of Islamic publishing, selling her own books and books of other IWA members from her Internet website.

Sara has a BA in Linguistics & French and a postgraduate qualification in teaching English. She is the author of *From Utah to Eternity*, which was published in the UK, and has

recently completed a book on hijab. She also has a number of articles to her credit. She pursues her writing career from home whilst also raising a young family, describing her writing as, at times, a "compulsion". She fits in work around her family and household responsibilities, setting daily targets or even writing at midnight when all the children are in bed.

Naheed is a radio journalist who works freelance. Her first degree is in political science and philosophy, which was followed by a graduate program in journalism. She works in radio with a focus on documentary-making. Using basic digital recording equipment that she has purchased for herself and editing her material in the studios of the radio station for which she works, Naheed researches stories, conducts interviews and puts together pieces which may be aired on both local and national radio.

Noor was embarking on a career as a professional opera singer prior to her conversion, after which she gave up that career and took a series of office and administrative jobs. After getting married and becoming involved in the Muslim community, she started her own company to produce Islamic media for Muslim children. She writes that she is "solely responsible for the creation and production of all our audio products. In addition I write/review all marketing material for our company, including Website and catalog. I have done everything from shipping clerk to conventions to PR."

A number of other sisters also work at home or out of the home.

At the time of my survey, **Anne-Marie** was running a school uniform and clothing company out of her home, supplying

school uniforms to a number of Islamic schools in her region, and providing stylish yet modest clothes for Muslim women and girls. The clothes were produced both overseas in Pakistan (mostly the school uniforms) and locally by sisters who sewed them in their homes. Customers were able to come, by appointment, to view clothes in her home where the basement had been converted into a showroom. Anne-Marie has a solid background in the world of work, having worked as a nanny and in office and restaurant jobs; she also ran her own restaurant, with her husband, for a few years. These skills were all acquired in "hands-on" fashion, as she dropped out of high school in grade 10. Anne-Marie went back to school as an adult to get her high school diploma, and graduated in the mid-90s. The uniform and clothing business ceased operation when Anne-Marie moved, during the writing of this book, to her husband's country, where she is now managing a leisure centre.

Another home-based entrepreneur, **Doris**, has two different (but somewhat related) businesses on the go. Through contacts in her husband's native Morocco, she imports rare cooking and body-care oils processed by a women's cooperative in Morocco. She also organizes trips to Morocco, where she takes small groups of travellers on tours, introducing them to the land and its culture and heritage. She developed these businesses after retiring from the social work field, in which she had been involved for fifteen years.

Arts and crafts also feature in the home-based entrepreneur field. **Munira** has a leather workshop which has turned into a family business, in which they are keeping an ancient craft alive. She learned her craft when she met and married her husband who worked with leather. Using the ancient arts of

tooling and embossing, learned from an elderly craftsman, they make bags, briefcases, desk articles and photo albums. Born in California of Portuguese background, Munira lives and works in Granada, Spain.

Erica has a diploma in Advertising and Graphic Design and worked full-time in a graphic studio before having children. She now does work for her husband's company as well as for other clients. Her life-long passion is in fact the fine arts – graphic design was a practical compromise as she felt it is next to impossible to earn a living in the fine arts – and she is seeking to develop her artistic skills with the aim of working in book illustration.

Erica also runs a small family farm – perhaps the ultimate in working and providing for one's family at home. With a vegetable garden and laying hens, as well as chickens, ducks and sheep for meat, many of the family's food needs are met at home. They also keep horses, and with a neighbour's help her children are beginning to learn about training young horses; the children also trade barn chores for riding lessons at a nearby stables. She points out that in today's world no one can make a real living in farming any more, and that those who take on small farms do it for their own family's needs and to sell a little to friends; often one spouse or both will need to have a job off the farm, or there is the option of telecommuting.

Omayya works as a computer consultant. She has a BS in sociology from Lebanon and a computer programming diploma from Canada. Working for the same company for 12 years gave her the opportunity to receive a lot of on-the-job training. She now telecommutes from home.

Two sisters in particular are what I regard as "master jugglers". In addition to being wives and mothers (one is

also homeschooling her children), they work both at home and outside the home.

At the time of the survey, **Jennifer** was working in community development for an Islamic organization, a job which took her out of the home and into the offices of the organization, as well as to conferences and various locations in the community. She was also teaching occasional undergraduate courses at the local university, and was the editor of a small professional publication in her field, a job which is home-based thanks to modern communications. She was also pursuing a part-time writing career, another home-based venture.

Jennifer has a PhD and was faced with the dilemma that many of those who achieve such high qualifications encounter: how to enter and establish herself in the academic world. She points out that academia is a "hard nut to crack" with a scarcity of secure, well-paying positions, except for the few who get tenure. Achieving that means that "you have to be prepared to lecture in other parts of the world, such as a series of 1-2 year contracts in small colleges in the States...It is not an easy option for women who have to follow their husbands, or for a man with a family who does not want to uproot them."

The other career choice for many PhDs – the civil service or government jobs – is often the "default" for those who, although well qualified, are unable to find positions in the academic field with its limited options. A significant problem for many who hold postgraduate degrees is that they are regarded as "overqualified" for many positions.

Jennifer is striving to achieve a balance between all these professional interests and is now forging her own unique path, one that utilizes her talents whilst also allowing her to spend time with her young family, spending part of her time working in the community and part of her time working at home.

Fatma's answer to my question, "What do you do?" read as follows:

"I do not hold one title alone. I am first and foremost a mother. 2. Housewife. 3. Homeschooler. 4 Dental Hygienist. 5. Entrepreneur."

Work as a dental hygienist, for which she has the necessary qualifications, obviously takes Fatma out of the home, where she works for a Muslim dentist and serves a varied clientele of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Her small business, Hijab Pins, is home-based, and she sells the pins via her website, at Islamic conferences and bazaars in her region, and through placement of her product in stores.

Outside the home

Jasminka is a lawyer, involved in research and civil litigation, spending time in the law offices and in court. She has a BA and LLB (law degree), and describes "being raised in a family and community where we were sensitive to injustices and a desire to help others" as important factors which led to her choice of career. Married with children, she is faced with the usual juggling act, and reports that her husband helps out on the home front.

Julia is a Nurse Practitioner; after working as a nurse for more than a decade, she went back to school for a Master's degree and further training which qualifies her to work as a Nurse Practitioner. This training allows her to take a patient's medical history, conduct a physical exam, order certain diagnostic tests like x-rays, CT scans and MRIs, and order medications for patients from a specific list of allowed drugs. She works regular hours (not shift work) in a hospital ward.

Furkan is a dentist with her own practice. Born and raised in Turkey, she attended a dental college in Istanbul that teaches in English. She is in general practice, treating mouth and jaw diseases, performing minor surgeries and doing cosmetic and family dentistry.

Mira is a nurse/midwife who works in pre-natal instruction, coaching expectant mothers on what to expect in childbirth and how to prepare themselves. After years spent in hospital wards and delivering babies in the labour suite, she regards this job as a lot of fun.

Anna is a paediatric nurse, currently working as a clinical support nurse in a psychiatric department. With a diploma in nursing, she has worked in diagnostic imaging and psychiatry, and on the IV team, as well as in general paediatric nursing. As a nurse she is able to deal with "gross things" such as vomit, and with grief, both her own and other people's. Patients, including children, do die in hospitals, and after having children of her own, Anna found it too hard to cope with such losses on the ward. That was when she chose to switch from medical nursing to the psychiatric ward, where many of her patients have eating disorders.

Saadia is a family physician working with a diverse range of patients from all backgrounds. With a high school education in the Middle East and university and medical school in Canada, Saadia says,

"I truly love my job (alhamdulillah). I feel gratified by being able to help other human beings. I enjoy interacting with people of all ages, races, religions and backgrounds. I like getting to know people on a very personal level and having many generations of the same family in my practice. I am there to see my patients when they are ill, and again when

they are better again. It is very satisfying to know that I have been able to make a difference in someone's life."

A number of sisters have careers in the scientific fields, dispelling any lingering myths about girls lacking in mathematical or scientific ability.

Ouardah is an electrical engineer with experience as a cost engineer and as a research assistant in electronic system design. She has an engineering degree in electronics and a master's degree in system design (electronics). In her native country she worked on teams designing electronic systems for various uses, such as ultrasound scans, but the slow pace of the work, including waiting months to obtain essential parts and the fact that similar systems could be obtained more cheaply from abroad, led to a great deal of frustration. After migrating to Canada Ouardah, like many immigrants, found it difficult to have her qualifications accepted in the workplace and has taken courses to earn qualifications that will be acceptable to employers in this country.

Howaidah is a transportation engineer with a background in civil engineering. Her job involves computer modeling, report writing and public meetings. She took an interest in math and science from grade 11 onwards, but also wanted a career that directly impacted people and how they live – for her civil engineering met both needs

Charlette also excelled in math in high school, as well as computer and accounting courses. She went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree and now in the IT field, working as a technical application specialist/business analyst. After acing her math, science and computer courses in high school, **Shariah** took a year off between high school and college, during which time she worked a minimum wage job. This experience made her realize that she needed an

education as well as a degree in a fast-growing industry, in order to be successful. She works as an hourly contractor as a business analyst in the IT field, assisting in the development of computer applications and products.

Hoda is a computer science specialist with a PhD who has worked in industry and in research at the post-doctoral level. Coming from an academic family which places great importance on both family values and academic achievement, Hoda is currently taking time off to focus on raising her family whilst also taking an active role in a Muslim women's organization. Her last post, as a Research Associate working with faculty at two regional universities, was home-based so she was able to be available for her children whilst also pursuing her career.

Huma is a research coordinator/senior research associate, working in pre-clinical research (cancer therapy), utilizing a degree in microbiology and a diploma in biological engineering. She particularly relishes the fact that she is "engaging in something beneficial to humanity with the skills Allah has given me, [but] I dislike the corporate side of the pharmaceutical industry."

Amena has a BA in Economics and Sociology and a MA in Political Science. Although she enjoyed science in high school, she later switched her focus to the social sciences, as she loved learning about people and ideas, and likes to see how faith can change society for the better. She is now a research analyst working in a government department, coordinating and disseminating information primarily on Statistics Canada survey data.

Jamilla is an Assistant Professor of Religion in a college in the United States, teaching undergraduate students and

conducting scholarly research. She has a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering and a master's and doctorate in Religion (Islamic Studies). She loves learning more about Islam and teaching it, as well as inspiring young women and men.

Hanan works as a teaching assistant in an Islamic school, working in the kindergarten classroom. She has worked in several Islamic schools, which has enabled her to educate her children in those schools instead of the public school system. Despite the frustrations of long hours and poor pay with no benefits, she loves working with the children and enjoys the contact with the Muslim community and the sisterhood she feels with her fellow staff-members.

Khadija is a graduate student and also works as a teaching assistant, in religious studies. A scholarly lady who loves to read and engage ideas, as well as write, she aspires to an academic career and comments that "the thought of being paid in order to think is irresistible."

Heather is a teaching assistant in a political science department, and is also pursuing PhD studies in public and international affairs. She has also taught ESL/EFL, and has a MA in TEFL, as well as another MA in political science. She also teaches writing to college students.

Zuhra is a tutor/assessor. She tutors adults who are interested in working in the field of care and education of children 0-8 years old. She draws upon her previous experience as a childcare worker as well as volunteer experience teaching in the local "madrasah" to enrich her tutoring. Zuhra notes that her father's assumption was that she would not need to work and her husband would take care of her, so he took her out of school at age 14 and she

had to learn domestic skills such as cooking and sewing. It was in fact her husband who pushed her to complete her education, and offered encouragement and support.

Rabaa is head of Geography in a girls' school in the Middle East, teaching the British curriculum up to "A level" (18 years old). With a Masters degree in Geography and a Certificate in Teaching, she has taught in English-medium schools in the Arab world before taking up her current position.

With a qualification in Advertising Design which allowed her to pursue her twin loves of computers and art, **Salima** works full time in marketing, where she takes marketing projects from concept to production of advertising material such as brochures, catalogs etc. Salima also has her own business, designing and selling Islamic clothing, which enables her to put to use a life-long interest in fashion design.

Naz is a marketing and promotions officer, writing articles, organizing events and conducting research. She has a degree in Tourism and enjoys working with people, but gets frustrated with the "politics" in the workplace.

Aaminah is a business administrator in a non-profit counselling organization, as well as a freelance writer. She started out as office assistant and researcher/writer, and her role developed into something more, "because it is a small organization and the founder is also the executive director and is a bit unorthodox, so he gave me the opportunity to do far more than my education implies I could do."

Rabia is a diversity consultant, "undertaking any kind of project or contract within the not-for-profit

sector, specializing in disability and diversity and the intersectionalities of that." Currently working from home with her own company, she has a degree in which she majored in political science and industrial relations, with a minor in professional writing. Her work experience in the not-for-profit sector includes both paid and volunteer positions in HR (human resources), as well as working as an information officer and client services officer in an employment service for people with disabilities, and running awareness workshops for banks, corporations, city hall and so on, educating people on "disability and access issues so that they can understand and respect the need for accommodation and access." Drawing on these experiences and a strong network of contacts developed over the years, Rabia continues her work on her own terms, balancing it with her family commitments and volunteer work in the community.

Pamela works as the fundraiser for a major Islamic organization, coordinating fundraising events and working on direct mail fundraising campaigns. She is also a freelance writer and uses her writing skills in her work.

Rosie is a university admission executive officer in the UK; her main reason for working at present is to help her husband who is an overseas doctor, doing an unpaid clinical attachment. She has a degree and hopes to be able to return to study when her husband's career is established, in sha Allah.

Felldelah has a flair for figures and works as a finance administrator in a petroleum company. She has qualifications in Sales and Marketing and Marketing Management, and is still studying Business Management, which she describes as equivalent to a "mini MBA".

Nimat works in "administration, rendering support to others in a business environment". Her education includes certificates and diplomas from Ohio University and Cheyney University. She also writes on a volunteer basis for a Muslim newspaper and has a book coming out, in sha Allah.

Bailey is a manicurist/nail technician, doing manicures and pedicures, hand and foot massage, grooming nails and applying polish for women. This is a part-time job which helps with the family income, as she and her husband are both students. It is a job that is not too physically or mentally demanding, so it leaves some energy at the end of the day for studying, although Bailey points out that she was surprised at "how much chemistry and anatomy you have to memorize even to pass the cosmo [cosmetology] exams!"

Why do they do it?

Muslim women work for a variety of reasons, of which **financial** considerations are only one factor. Other reasons given included a wish for **self-fulfilment** and **intellectual stimulation**, especially among women who felt that home-making was not their area of strength, yet felt the desire to make a **contribution to society**.

When looking at financial considerations, in some cases a woman has little choice. Some respondents were the sole breadwinners in their families, such as Naz whose parents' health problems prevent them from working; as the eldest of four daughters, with no brothers and no other family around, the burden of providing for the family falls on her shoulders. Those women who are single or divorced may have had to earn their own living, and in some cases are contributing to the support of parents or younger siblings.

Divorced mothers often find themselves responsible for raising children alone, with no help; a South African woman notes that social assistance is not available in her country for people under the age of 60.

Facing some hard facts of life, some women have husbands whose income is unreliable, so their work is essential to help provide for the family, or they have found themselves in marriages that are unstable. In one case experience taught a woman to take care of herself so that she will not find herself in dire straits again: "I work because I have to. We live simply, with very little, but I cannot survive on only my husband's income. Also, in my case, my husband and I are not always stable so I have to work to ensure that my needs (and my son's needs) are consistently met. ... in the case of separation, I cannot risk being left with nothing, and this has happened to me in the past and I learned from the experience."

Khadija also has a husband whose income is not always reliable: "Yes, I definitely need to work. There is no way we would survive on my husband's pay alone, especially not now with my eldest son starting college. My husband works as a supply teacher, and makes a bit also doing translation work. This is a low and not very dependable income, especially in the summer, and we have four kids."

Some women are supporting their husbands until they are established in their own careers, such as Rosie whose foreign-trained doctor husband has to work for little or no pay in order to gain British experience in his field, and Salima whose husband wants to take training to become a police officer. Both women hope their working lives will change once their husbands' careers are established; Rosie aims to move to part-time employment and Salima hopes to focus more on her small business.

Working towards a future career is a motive for Bailey, who does not plan to be a nail technician forever. Her

work enables her to pay for her university courses. After considering a career in law, she has now decided on education as her future field.

The future is also a concern for Khadija, who has given plenty of thought to the "what ifs" of divorce or widowhood, as well as anticipating her old age. As a convert with no family ties or support to fall back on in the Muslim community, she has no illusions:

"As a convert, I also am aware that the 'traditional' ideas, that your family will always support you even if you are divorced or widowed, aren't applicable in my case. The government keeps sending me these cheering little notices about how much old age pension I will be entitled to when I reach retirement age. The latest informs me that I will receive the grand total of \$35.00 a month! Even if I lived under a bridge, I doubt that \$35 would keep me alive. Those sheikhs who preach about women staying home aren't going to pay my bills either. Their 'solution' to destitute sisters is that they get married. Let's be real – who in the Muslim community wants to marry an old, impoverished convert? Clearly, if I am to have a dignified old age, I must be able to support myself, and I see no reason why I should have to justify wanting to live in dignity."

In some parts of the world one income is not enough, whether it is because of a high cost of living or because of the desire to enrol their children in Islamic schools, or pay for extra tuition or sports activities and the like, or to pay for trips abroad to visit family "back home" and "know their roots". Pamela is grateful that her husband's income is sufficient for the basics, but she says that as a writer, she works "for pay, because I can bring in money that allows our family to do things we otherwise wouldn't be able to do... my income allows for some extras – sports and music lessons, travel, saving for college – that we couldn't afford otherwise. I also spend more on myself than I otherwise

would – on books, art, travelling to conferences, new clothes.”

Hanan worked in Islamic schools for many years to enable her to register her children in the same schools, as many Islamic schools allow children of staff members to attend for free. So in addition to the salary, she ensured that her children got the kind of education that she believes is important for them.

Some women work to earn themselves their own money, so that they can pursue their own interests. One of the things that Heather spends her money on, besides activities for the children, is decorating her house as she likes “without comments from husband”. Anna also enjoys being able to take her children out, which having her own money enables her to do.

Some women use part of their income to donate to favourite charities, and relish being able to do so. Doris notes that this is one of the things that being a working woman enables her to do, and having her own income has enabled Zuhra to sponsor children overseas. Howaida also finds a great deal of satisfaction in “being able to donate to charity freely, knowing that mine is not the main income for the family.”

Having her own income enables Rabia, who has a disability, to surround herself with services that help her to have a better lifestyle – “Essentially, I supplement our household income in order to purchase services that assist me in maintaining a healthy household. In order words, I pay for someone to tutor my kids and help me around the house on a part-time basis, along with perks like vacations etc.”

Valuing one’s education and wanting to make good use of it motivates some women. Jasminka says, “I went through 6 years of university and was always taught by my parents that education is critical. I am glad to put my education to use.”

Contributing to the community is a powerful motive for several women. Saadia, a family doctor, enjoys the interaction with others and the fact that her job enables her to help people: "I love my job and how I am able to give to the Muslim community through my work. Therefore, I continue to work part-time. I enjoy interacting with people, reading, problem-solving and caring for people at a time when they are not well."

Zuhra enjoys teaching others and passing on her skills and knowledge as well: "No, I do not need or have to work; I choose to do so to make a contribution to the society and to assist in training both Muslims and non Muslims in the field of childcare."

Rabia feels strongly that she can make a difference for ethnic minorities and people with disabilities through her work: "I work in a field where I can engage in instigating social change to promote inclusion."

Self fulfilment is important to many working women, who crave intellectual stimulation that is hard to find in domesticity. These women find that housework is not enough, or that it is not the area in which they excel, and they seek other outlets for their talents. It is frustrating to be judged on an area (such as housework or cooking) which is not one's *forte* and to have other talents dismissed or ignored. As Rabia states: "I work because this is what I do best."

Creative urges motivate many, especially the writers who, as Pamela says, "get grumpy" if they don't write. Munira's leatherwork business also started as a creative outlet and self fulfilment. For such women, home and family is not enough to fulfil their creativity. Sara derives immense satisfaction "from the writing itself and being given the chance to reach the hearts of other people."

Intellectual stimulation featured prominently as a motivator for many women. Like Charlette, they enjoy their work with

all its challenges and welcome the opportunities to expand their knowledge of their fields. Julia, a nurse practitioner, says that she is utterly fascinated by her work: "I really enjoy it, it's extremely interesting to me, intellectually fascinating, stimulating, exciting to me." Furkan enjoys the intricacies of her work as a dentist: "I get an unexplainable satisfaction by performing complex procedures."

The women who are also mothers all spoke of the importance of the mother's role and of being attentive and committed parents, but they also spoke frankly of their need for additional stimulation in their lives, especially when children are small and taking care of them is physically sheer hard work, as anyone who has looked after a very small child knows; keeping up with a recently mobile toddler who gets "into everything" can be quite exhausting. Jennifer and Naheed, who are both part-time working mothers, report that the break from home and children, and the intellectual stimulation provided by work in a grown-up environment, makes them feel reinvigorated and ready to continue with the challenges of the home. Another part-time working mother of small children quite honestly noted, "I think I would end up on medication if I stayed home full-time. ... I need that mental stimulation too. My brain needs to engage in something other than ABCs and 123s."

Zuhra draws attention to the fact that children grow up and the intensive "hands-on" stage of parenting lasts only a few years; her children are soon to be at university, so there is not much for her to do at home. Her chosen way to make use of her time is to work in the field that she is trained for. Plans to throw oneself wholeheartedly into motherhood may sometimes remain unfulfilled. Noor was looking forward to raising a brood of children, but health problems after the birth of her son led to a decision to avoid jeopardizing her health further with any more childbearing,

and she has had no more children. Instead she has chosen to focus her talents on her business, which produces Islamic books, CDs etc. She feels blessed to have had the experience of motherhood but also to have the opportunity to use her talents for business.

Most women mentioned a combination of financial, altruistic and personal motives for their work. The reasons why Muslim women work are as varied as the women themselves.

What if you aren't a wife or mother?

Last but not least is an issue that is seldom acknowledged or talked about among Muslims, viz., the role of wife and mother, which is held up as the ideal for Muslim women, is not available for every woman. Some women never get married, for many reasons. Others find themselves widowed or divorced, with or without children. Infertility is an issue that is also rarely discussed among Muslims, other than the painfully invasive "what no baby yet?" questions that the infertile Muslim couple must endure. What are these women to do? It is a waste of the ummah's resources to expect them to stay home with little to do in the home. One respondent, who is divorced and childless, pointed to the example of 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), the majority of whose life was spent as a childless widow; she lived until her 60s and was childless yet played a very important role in Islam. Even if you have children, this sister noted, it is "hands-on for only a few years. Then what do you do? Become a busybody aunty?"

PART THREE

Making It Happen

So how did these women find their way into the careers they work in now? We have already looked at ways of deciding upon a job or career, in part 2. In this section, the women who spoke to me told me of the experiences, in school and outside, which led them to make the choices they made. The importance of support and mentors is also discussed.

Education and life

As referred to above, many of the women I contacted have formal academic qualifications, not always in the fields in which they are currently working. The academic certificates range from high school diplomas (including one acquired in adulthood by a former grade 10 dropout) through an assortment of post-secondary diplomas and certificates, to degrees all the way up to PhD.

Some women report "false starts", as it were – one woman who started nursing school quickly realized that nursing was not for her and switched to secretarial training, where she excelled. Others have qualifications in two or more fields, such as Heather, who has Masters degrees in both Political Science and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and Doris who has post-secondary diplomas in Radio and Television Arts and Human Services Counselling, among other achievements.

Uncompleted courses were mentioned by several woman, who had started degrees and diplomas in various fields, such as science and business management, but other matters, such as marriage and the arrival of children,

including difficult pregnancies, meant that the studies had to be put on hold. Some women still hope to complete their studies, whereas others have developed new interests and careers in the meantime.

On the other hand, Zuhra reports that her father brought her up to expect that her husband would take care of her, so he took her out of school at age 14 and she was married early. Her husband then encouraged her to complete her education and enter the world of work.

There are women whose current jobs do not reflect their ultimate goals in life, but are stepping-stones on the way to fulfilling their ambitions. Bailey works as a nail technician, with the appropriate qualifications, but her work is aimed at supporting herself during her studies. Rosie is working at present to support her husband, who is a foreign-trained doctor, and hopes to go back to school in the future.

Not everyone who studies a subject and earns qualifications in that field will find a job in the same field. Although the doctors, nurses and lawyers in the survey are obviously using their degrees, other women find themselves working in fields that they did not originally plan to enter. In the case of Noor, the switch was precipitated by entering Islam. With a strong musical background and a budding career as a performer, Noor soon found that this was an unsuitable occupation for a Muslim woman, so she turned her attention to furthering her office experience, working for a temp agency. This was followed by a stint in a medical clinic, and after becoming a mother, she started her own business, producing Islamic media for children.

As to why women choose the fields they do, the vicissitudes of life often play a role. Erica has a lifelong love of the arts, but realized at an early age that the fine arts would be unlikely to provide a living wage, so she took a practical approach and went into graphic design. She also grew up in the country, the daughter of a farmer, and loved the rural

lifestyle which was in her blood, as it were. Although she points out that in these days of "factory farming" it is almost impossible to make a living by farming alone – most of the farming families in her rural community also have jobs off the farm – her experience of "hobby farming" has helped to feed her family and taught them all many valuable life lessons.

For Anna, it was a stint as a volunteer during her high school years that helped her choose her career path. Her friend wanted to be a nurse and Anna went along with her to a placement working with handicapped children for a day. The children had severe cerebral palsy and Anna found it difficult to deal with at first. She wanted to leave but her friend made her stay, and said, "They need our help." Her friend's words made her see things differently, and she realized that helping these children would make a difference for a day, and "If I was a nurse, I could make a difference, I could be a kids' nurse and help kids."

As mentioned above, Patricia found her way into editing jobs when she was raising her children. Editing brought the realization that she could write as well as most of the people whose work she was editing, if not better.

Marriage was the catalyst in Doris's case; her Moroccan husband's family embraced her as their own from the outset, and she enjoyed her visits to his country so much that she developed her two business interests which focus on that country. Doris had worked in other fields before that, most notably in social services, and the change from that field was also precipitated by health issues that held her back from working.

Marriage was also a factor for Munira, whose husband was working with leather when they met, and she became interested in the craft too. Her newfound interest was put aside for a while, as the couple became Muslim, began a new life and children began to arrive. As the children

started school, Munira dusted off her old tools and took up the leatherworking where she had left off, and it has now developed into a fulltime business.

Hanan's work as a teaching assistant in Muslim schools grew with her children. When her oldest child was of kindergarten age, the local Muslim community started an Islamic school. When he reached grade 1, the school had expanded and needed help. Hanan drove the school van, organized trips and did secretarial work for the school, in return for her children's school fees being waived. A move to another city brought a job in another Islamic school, a paid position from which school fees had to be paid. A further move led to a position in another school that pays its staff, but lets children of staff members attend for free. In this way Hanan has procured an Islamic education for her children for many years.

Typing up her husband's PhD thesis and pondering where life was taking her led Khadija to pursue a career in academia. She felt that she could write something at least as good as the thesis she was typing, and getting a PhD no longer seemed so daunting after that. Tired of having her experience as a western Muslim woman defined by others, she wanted to gain an authoritative voice of her own. Financial concerns tipped the balance, and realizing that an MA in Islamic studies didn't translate into any kind of employment and that she did not want to end up clerking in Wal-Mart or doing any similar kind of job, she decided to go back to school to get a PhD and try to find work in her field. She describes it as "a gamble, but one I was willing to take."

Aaminah states that she didn't make good choices in high school but she did excel in English. She obtained a diploma in general office skills through a program to help low-income women obtain marketable skills. After working in several jobs, she joined the organization where she

now works as a business administrator. She began as an office assistant and researcher/writer, but her role quickly expanded. Working in a small organization where the founder is also executive director and "does things a bit unorthodox" meant that Aaminah was given opportunities to do far more than her paper qualifications might suggest she can do. She also reflects that her father taught her that the best education she could ever get was from reading on her own, and she notes that he was right.

Mentors and role models

Mentors and role models matter, because they offer inspiration, encouragement and support. If there is no mentor at home then you can seek out a role model at school, in the community or even a remote model such as a prominent figure in your chosen field, as Naheed mentions below. It is important to be open to positive influences.

Several women had family members who were role models: *especially mothers*

Nimat Marie, who works in business administration, has many professionals in her family, including five doctors; her mother was a Management Analyst for the government and her grandmother was an entrepreneur.

Mira, a nurse/midwife, says that her first role model was "my mother ... tough yet soft when she needed to be. Strong physically, mentally and spiritually. I really looked up to her." Next came her aunt: "She opened up the world to me, she was a world traveller, younger than my mom. Really pushed herself to get educated. She was one of 14, ended up a small court judge." What Mira learned from her aunt was: "Perseverance, keep going after your goals and dreams."

A convert of many years' standing, Mira adds that she had many Muslim women who became her mentors when she first became Muslim, all of whom were working women as

well, a doctor, biologist and teacher among them.

Jamillah, an assistant professor of religion in a US college, also describes her mother as a role model – “a mother of beautiful character and who worked hard and was always kind and positive to her children”; she also found a mentor in her journalism teacher, women in her community “who struggled and sacrificed for their communities and who’ve always expressed a deep love and enthusiasm for Islam” and “female members of my larger family who achieved.” Another woman who is inspired by her mother is Omayya, who now works as a computer consultant:

“My mom was always, and still is, and will always be my inspiration in life. I owe any success I have to her. The wisdom that she planted in me, and the hard work that she trained me to do, and accept, helped me in a big way. May God bless her.”

Noor, who left the music world behind and now runs an Islamic media company, also speaks in glowing terms of her mother’s example: “My mother ... was lovely inside and out and strove all her life to better herself. She was artistic and a peacemaker who always had a smile and a kind or pleasant word for everyone. A gracious woman, who never raised her voice, had artistic flair and decorated our home as well as any designer with second hand items. She taught me to make do with what I had, always strive for diplomacy and treat others as you would like to be treated. I became a Muslim because of her.”

Huma, who works in the field of pre-clinical research, describes her mother as “a big proponent of higher education, whose family welcomed education for girls (she was a principal in India, with an MA in English Lit.) at a time when it was not common for women to become professionals.”

Doris grew up with a mother who always worked:

“She (like me) was born in Malta. She lost her father at a

very early age. The Second World War devastated Malta. My mother had to work early in her life, even though she had loved school, but could not afford to continue. I don't think she had more than a grade 8 education. She and my father wanted us to have an education and even though they both worked full time, they never failed to help us with our homework or our projects. They were very involved in our school lives. My mother had a lot of fears due to her experiences during the war, but she overcame them by not letting them stop her from doing what she wanted. We went to England and came to Canada by boat, but she was petrified of water, never having learned to swim. The first time she flew, she was also petrified, but continued to do so because she loved to travel. Once she retired, she started facilitating trips of seniors to many places in the world."

Amena's parents emphasized the importance of education as an Islamic value, for both women and men. A research analyst with a background in social sciences, she also cites the influence of a couple of teachers, and also the books of Muslim scholars whose writing encouraged her to see Islam as open and free.

The emphasis on education was also present in Howaidah's upbringing. The transport engineer notes that both of her parents encouraged "excellence in academics and honour, honesty and respect in all that we do."

Jennifer, an academic who also works in community development, also speaks of parental support: "my parents encouraged me and supported me from the outside. They encouraged me to [take a scholarship] and to switch my major to arts. They did not put any pressure on me to study any particular field; they told me to do what I liked and was interested in."

Saadia, a family doctor, has parents who also encouraged her to do well and this encouragement was accompanied

with wise advice "to pursue a career that I could always fall back on when needed."

Fathers

Some sisters point to their father as their primary role model, and the parent who perhaps had the greater influence on them. Fatma, the homeschooling entrepreneur and dental hygienist, acknowledges the support of both of her parents, but notes that her father was particularly involved in her upbringing:

"My parents have always supported my decisions. They have always given me guidelines to go by and suggestions as to how they would like to see me lead my life (whether I actually listened to them or followed their advice every time is another book). They have definitely helped to mold me into the person I am.

"My father has always been interested in my hobbies. The one thing that I have always loved is that he has ALWAYS taken an active role in my pursuits. He would stay up with me every night when I was in high school. Until 2:00 a.m. sometimes, just helping me colour or add details to projects that I was working on. He helps me in the design of some of my pins and sometimes makes some of them for me. He tests out different adhesives and materials for me."

Ouardah, an electrical engineer, remembers her father with fondness and spoke of him learning to read and write at an advanced age:

"My father never went to school, he used to be a peasant. He reads in French and Arabic, reads Qur'an and teaches others. I don't know how he learned, we were small, so we didn't find out how he learned.

"He was like 50, approaching 50, they started classes, *mahw ul-ummiyyah*, eradicating illiteracy. He bought books and copybooks and went to study. A great example. He was

in construction, building houses, a gardener. [He was] always working and if not working he would be playing or teaching us."

Ouardah's father was involved in the liberation struggle in her country, and she remembers an incident that took place shortly after her country won independence:

"At revolution time, they would have a meeting and say this, this and this will be done this week, and that week it would be done. This is why they won the war. People were great. After the revolution, I don't know what happened, they go for a meeting, they decide a lot of stuff, then it doesn't get done. Just talk. One day he came home so upset, burned all his papers related to the revolution, very upset. [He] brought me and my sister and said: Listen to me, there are no more men in this society! I was 12 or 13 and my sister was 7. He said: There are no more men, don't count on going to get married, you have to work hard, you have to study, rely on yourself! Have to count on yourself. Don't think you are going to get married! No men! [It was] a powerful message for a young girl..."

Ouardah also remembers her mother's contribution to the family's needs: "Because my father had not the means, she would work hard, everything was made by herself, 90 percent of food. [She] had a big garden, plant[ed] vegetables, she helped him. [They were] hardworking people, and very happy too."

At the time of my research, Hoda was taking a break from her career in computer science to raise children, and looks at her father's experience of having to take a break in his own career for a number of complicated reasons, but he was able to return to his career and when he retired he was a triple-A fellow in his field.

When it comes to farming, Erica's father was her primary role model. "I was a Daddy's girl." She used to work alongside him on the family farm: "He taught me to drive

a tractor when I was 11 or 12. He would drive one and I would drive the other."

Erica grew up in the country and the family always farmed to some extent. She says: "When I was a baby we had full scale farming, but then as I got older my dad went to work off the farm ... so we just hobby farmed, we always had a few horses, chickens, cows. [And] we always had crops and tractors. ... So I guess my dad influenced me. I have members of my family who are farmers. That way of life, it's in the blood."

Other family members were also sources of encouragement or good advice in some cases. Anna describes her "ex-aunt (divorced from my mom's brother)" who "was a nurse and she also got me thinking. She told me to go to university, not college. You need a degree now... you can't get into nursing with a [college] diploma only now."

Husbands

Several sisters mentioned their supportive husbands; Jennifer spoke of her husband as a mentor for her professional life: "he is very learned. On both Islamic and professional/job matters, I find his judgement and advice to be very good, and I can often bounce ideas off him with good results."

Jennifer also notes that a supportive husband is essential to the would-be working woman; you can't do it without a supportive husband or a lot of stress and anxiety.

Perhaps surprisingly, in one case children were described as an inspiration. Patricia speaks of her adult children:

"My eldest daughter has always been a great inspiration to me. She's so enthusiastic for everything she does in life, and she has overcome great odds on many occasions. She is the typical 'indomitable spirit.' My other two daughters are

also exceptional examples of what a Muslim woman should be. They have all got good degrees and two are working on their Master's now."

Teachers

As well as family, some women found support in their teachers, whether at school or college/university.

Pamela, a writer and fund-raiser for an Islamic organization, remembers an elementary school teacher who sowed the seed, as it were: "Well, I always wanted to be a writer, since 6th grade, when my teacher assigned us to write a story which she then made into books. It was so much fun. I decided that I wanted to be a writer." The leader of her writer's group was also an important influence who inspired Pamela by her example.

Linda, a writer and publisher, was also blessed with a caring teacher who encouraged her to overcome the challenges she faced in her young life: "My sixth grade art teacher told me if I wanted to overcome the problems of being poor and an orphan (from 5th grade to adulthood) to read, study hard and be the best that I could be in everything I sought to do."

Professionals in the field

Some sisters found mentors in their chosen field, or people they could look up to as role models.

Hoda recalls her former supervisor from her student days: "Right now her career is doing really well. What I really, really respect her for is that she does the things that are interesting to her and she doesn't think about whatever people think or about money. Very rarely do you see that in a field like that; everyone talks about industry partnerships, grants, but she reminded me of 'the little engine that could',

because she would focus on her stuff and make sure her students were well treated. She is probably one of the more successful faculty members at Queens [University] right now, even though she did her own thing. ... Till now we keep in touch and she is still an inspiration to me."

Munira writes that she is blessed to work and learn with the last tooler of Granada. "He is a man of 77 yrs and a delight! He has taught me much about leather, about the history of Granada and about life."

Naheed has an unusual take on the role model idea: "I don't know any women (practicing Muslims) in journalism but a role model would be Ann Medina – a well-known Canadian journalist – who always presented herself in a smart and respectable way. I always thought she was inspiring."

Linda was fortunate to have a friend, sister in Islam and mentor in a fellow-writer:

"My dear sister-friend, Amatullah Al-Marwani, also a published author and gifted writer, taught me a lot about writing. She has leukemia, is going blind and yet she loves and trusts Allah, does many wonderful and creative activities in her community that promote reading for children and she inspires me to be a better Muslim and writer with her kind and gentle words of knowledge and support."

Lori also mentions a friend and fellow professional who helped her to find her place in the working world:

"My friend, Kay, is the one who encouraged me to apply for the proofreading job at the United Nations. She was one of the four editors I mentioned earlier. She turned me on to some classic reading material and was inspirational in her approach to editing. She taught me a lot about the English language and was always encouraging me to keep up with my education, even if it was self-taught."

Rabia notes that she has had many mentors, and she actively seeks out people that she "can learn from, bounce ideas

off and get feedback from." One of her primary mentors when it came to working with diversity and disability was a sister whom she met in the community, who was already working in the field:

"I was so impressed, seeing this woman in a mosque, roaming around in a wheelchair, in hijab. She got me into the grassroots stuff ... she motivated me in this direction, this whole intersectionality thing. I grabbed the ball and ran with it much further than she anticipated!"

What, no mentor?

Sadly, some sisters report having little or no support among family and friends. However, the achievements they told me of in their interviews and e-mails show that even without support, it is possible to succeed and excel, if you have faith and strong will power.

When asked whether she had any mentors or role models, Jasminka's reply was a bleak "Not really." Nevertheless, Jasminka is now an established lawyer with a steady workload.

When it comes to art, which is her passion, Erica had no role model in the family as such: "No one inspired me to draw. No one in the family... only my uncle but I didn't know him well. I drew from the time I was a little kid, on my own."

Rabaa, a teacher, notes: "I had no role models within my family or even at school since I did not like my school or the teachers in it!"

Khadija found no real role models until she started her PhD: "then I met several professors who were (and are) very encouraging and supportive."

Furkan, who is a dentist, shows the kind of courage and determination that is needed in such cases:

"Unfortunately I had to be a self-inspired person. I don't have extended family, so I never had a relative who was a

good example education-wise. My parents did not inspire me either, because their way of looking at life does not include academic life, career etc. If I were to follow them as role model, I would have spent the shortest period of school, and start making tons of money as soon as I am out."

Seeking out education and opportunity

Education, skills, mentors and experience are all things that the would-be working woman has to seek, actively.

One important thing to remember is that education is not something that happens only in school or university. Formal educational opportunities are important and you should make the most of them, but you should also be open to other chances to learn and grow, of which we will see more below.

If you are still in school or university, avail yourself of guidance counsellors and career information resources. Attend job fairs and talk to people who are working in the fields you are interested in, especially women and especially other Muslim women. Find out what their working life is like. Look at Internet sites which deal with issues of women and careers or women and work. – See the relevant Appendix for a few examples.

Don't ignore Islamic conferences and other community events. They offer further opportunities to network, meet sisters with a variety of experience, and find more sources of information. I once met a convert sister at an Islamic conference who was working in a male-dominated field that she had entered before becoming Muslim and continued in it because she felt it was too hard to switch streams. Her personal mission was to warn younger sisters against going into that field and to urge them to choose areas that were more suited to women. Sometimes the

bazaars at conferences will feature recruitment efforts by various organizations.

Now for that informal education. For a start, read, read, read! It's not for nothing that the first word of the Revelation was *Iqra'*! My own mother left school at 14, as was the norm in those days, especially for working families. She worked until she married and had children, then she stayed home for a few years and took some night school classes and read voraciously when we were small. Then when we were all in school, Mum went back to work, part-time at first, and full-time later on. But all that time she read everything she could, and became a self-educated, well-read woman. In her late 50s she began a part-time degree program with the British Open University, and graduated in the same year she retired. Today she continues to read widely and is a dedicated member of a seniors' organization devoted to lifelong learning.

Public libraries offer more than just books – there are CDs, movies and other media available for loan, and libraries often host classes and talks. In some cities the library may also host business and career information.

There are societies and clubs catering for most interests, and some of them are women-only or have a membership composed mostly of women. Local municipalities and colleges offer courses too. Think: night-school, extra-mural studies, continuing education.

The internet is another source of information. You have to be careful, of course, as there are a lot of weird things and strange people out there, but with common sense you can find useful websites, and ask questions and exchange information on dedicated bulletin boards.

There are also groups for working women and businesswomen, where women can network and exchange ideas, and attend seminars on topics of interest to professional women. In some areas there are programs aimed at helping

women find work and re-enter the workplace after a break for raising a family. Other programs may offer help to low-income and immigrant women. Such programs can help with resume writing and honing interview skills. There are fashions and trends in the world of work as in other spheres of life, so it is worth availing oneself of the opportunity to find out what styles of resume are currently in favour and what the job market's hottest trends are now.

Getting experience

How can you get experience if no one will give you a job? Volunteer! Donating your time and services is a way to gain valuable experience in the workplace, and make contacts that may lead to employment in the future. It looks good on a resume and does good in the community too. Mira spoke at length about the concept of volunteering, which she feels "is really strange to many of our sisters" and is "something that Muslims haven't been exploring to the fullest extent." She disagrees with the view of those who hesitate to do volunteer work in a "kaafir land" and points out various ways in which sisters can make a positive contribution to the Muslim community and the broader society:

"I'm sure you met some sisters who say this is a kaafir land, when I go back to ['back home'] I am going to do it for my people. I am of an understanding that Allah created the whole universe and everything in it, and Canada²¹ is Allah's land too, we are here for a purpose, and if you want to do any good now is the time to do it, because you never know how long Allah is going to give you. You may not have another week, year... this is the time, you can serve Allah here, maybe not in the same way as you would do it back home, but you have to find your way of doing it and if each person does a little a lot gets done. Instead of waiting for 1 or 2 or 5 sisters or 10 brothers in the masjid to do

everything, it's really not fair; you have to find your niche and what you're good at and contribute, be a productive person. Get that blessing, barakah and hasanah from Allah, because you are going to be desperate for every hasanah that you can achieve. This is the way to go."

Mira urges women to look beyond the housewife or mother role and to look at opportunities, paid or unpaid, to make a contribution to the community:

"Being at home, after you do the minimum of housecleaning and cooking, is not stimulating – we have to be fair. There is so much more to you as a mother, you can stimulate [your children] in so many ways: go to the library, participate, do volunteer activities, be active in the mosque, whatever. I always say to sisters: Allah doesn't create garbage, you have a value; find what your niche is, find your value, what you are made for. Some people are very good at writing books, some are totally useless with that, such as me, I can't even spell! Maybe I can do something else. Some people are very comfortable with going out and speaking in public, some are very shy but they love gardening, so maybe they can make a garden around the mosque, make it more beautiful, or help a sister who is writing a book. Or some sisters don't like earth, they don't like dirt, they don't like flowers but they love cooking, so she could make something for the sister who is tending the garden. Just because you are a housewife doesn't mean only cooking, cleaning, laundry, period. There is so much more there: be involved in politics, write letters to the newspapers, call TV stations, write to the Prime Minister if you have a cause, or volunteer in a hospital or shelter, or with environmental groups. There are so many avenues you can take to be a productive citizen within Islamic guidelines. Take the opportunity to expand your interests beyond the house, please do, no one is stopping you!"

Either in the Muslim community or beyond – there are women-only groups, or you can work with children, or groups that welcome and respect diversity. Rabia, a diversity consultant who is also a mother and has a disability, also spoke at length about volunteer work in the community and her motives for getting involved:

“... you have to set some boundaries, have a framework, be clear in what you want, you can’t compromise priorities. The trick is creating the right balance between family, faith and prosperity. You have to be comfortable with what you are doing. In today’s world, in our context here, dual income is a necessity, and for me it’s a requirement. It is not about having a lavish lifestyle but having the supports that I need to make my lifestyle natural, for the well-being of my kids. But one of the things I want to add is that my kids have become a focal point in everything that I do, and that’s a way that my life has come full circle in this whole community and identity thing where I am getting immersed in community stuff so they will be clear in their identity, I also realize there is lot of work to be done within the community to break down subgroups. Racial barriers, cultural, linguistic, gender, everything. So I am starting to take on certain leadership roles in different ways to make things happen. I’m sure there will be a lot of critics along the way and so be it, so long as my purpose is clear.

“There are some women who can’t restrict themselves to the mother and wife role. I can’t do it. I can’t just do nothing, that’s part of why I am getting involved, the community stuff is important as a focal point for my kids, but also to keep me occupied, keep me doing things, to keep my brain occupied. House and cooking is not enough for me, it’s not my forte, it’s not what turns me on, it’s not what motivates me, inspires, excites me to make things happen...”

Never say never

There are among us late bloomers, high school dropouts and career changers.

What if you never finished high school? Even if personal and family circumstances prevent you from completing high school (let alone further education), that need not be a barrier to work, and it does not necessarily condemn you to a lifetime of low paying dead-end jobs. With grit and determination you can make your way in the working world, and it is never too late to go back to school, as Anne-Marie told me:

“I have no pertinent education, no degree ... it is all hands-on. I have high school and some computer courses. I completed high school in 1996.

“I was a grade 10 drop out!

“My parents got divorced when I was 14. I finished grade 9 and started grade 10, but I had to quit. My mom had no money, she was on welfare, she couldn’t even pay a dime to put me on the bus. So I went to work, as a nanny, \$75 a week and she was so happy with that. Every year I said I would go back to school...”

After several years of working as a nanny, fruit picker and other jobs, Anne-Marie found herself without a job when the recession of the early 80s hit her native Quebec. She moved to the US and formed a plan, which did not work out as she had anticipated:

“I went to New York, decided to get a job, save some money, and travel in Europe. That was my dream. I went to New York in December 1982, and got stuck there for 7 years. I met my husband in 1986 in New York City, came back to Montreal in November 1989, and had [my daughter] in May of 1990...”

“All of this time I was always bothered that I didn’t have my high school diploma. But I gained so much experience. I

became a restaurant manager very quickly in New York, but I also owned my own restaurant, with my husband, for about 2 years. We did really well, but when I got pregnant I didn't want to have children in New York, it was just unthinkable, so we came up here [to Canada]. The whole thing about not having a diploma, I couldn't get an office job, I didn't know how to type, I didn't know anything, but I had these very strong managerial skills, so all my expertise was acquired hands-on as opposed to academically. I continued working in the restaurant business when I moved [to Montreal], then at one point I had had it so I said that's it, I'm going back to school. So I did my missing credits, I just needed 4-5 credits to complete my High School [diploma]. It took me about 2 years, because in between I had a miscarriage. I graduated in 1996.

"After I completed high school, it was easier for me to get an office job, so I got this customer service job and I was able to move up very quickly because of being bilingual ... and also because of the organizing skills I had already acquired from other work... so I do not have a formal education but it hasn't hindered me, alhamdulillah."

Changing track

What if you change your mind? What if you were always determined and happy to be a "stay at home mom" but now you feel that you want to find work? Or perhaps you have been working in field A for years but for whatever reason (downsizing, a move to a new city or country, returning to work after raising a family) you now decide that you want to try working in field B? It is never too late. Everything that has been said about gaining experience and training, and choosing a field, applies to late bloomers and career changers too.

The experiences of Fatma, Erica and Doris show that an individual woman may have several strings to her bow, whether concurrently, as in the case of Fatma, or serially, as in the case of Erica and Doris who have both moved from one area to another, from graphic design to farming, and from social worker to small business owner.

Making it happen takes some measure of determination. If you are still in school, make the most of your time there, but remember that education takes place outside of formal academic settings too. Keep an open mind and be open to new experiences and the opportunity to learn new skills and meet new people who may turn out to be mentors or useful contacts. Don't ignore the importance of volunteering as a means of gaining experience and skills as well as giving to the community. And remember, it's never too late!

PART FOUR

Issues in the Workplace

Women who enter the workplace may find themselves faced with problems in their jobs because of their gender and, if they also belong to an ethnic minority, for reasons of discrimination too. As women of faith, many of whom can be clearly identified as such because of their hijab, Muslim women may face additional hurdles at work, due to their identity and their attire and, sometimes, when the requirements of their faith are at odds with what is expected of them at various levels in the workplace. How women meet and overcome these challenges is the focus of this section.

Islamophobia and Racism

Discrimination may take many forms and may be based on differences in race or ethnicity, or because one is identifiably Muslim. Sad to say, Muslim women have experienced all kinds of discrimination on the job, and I asked them what challenges they had faced and what they had done about it.

In some cases it is not always easy to tell if the discriminatory treatment is due to racial factors or because of one's faith. One African-American sister who wears hijab initially faced "much apprehension among my co-workers as though I am a terrorist." She adds: "I didn't know if this rude behavior or indifferent behavior was because of my ethnicity or because I was Muslim with the last name Muhammad. It probably is both."

Islamophobia from non-Muslims

Huma, a research coordinator, notes that in the post-9/11 world, the "common media's racism seeps into the workplace and causes stress."

Julia, a Nurse Practitioner, remembers coming into a workplace where several of her colleagues were older women who were "from the Caribbean, like me," but they were Christian ladies who had formed their own clique. They refused to talk to Julia and would begin humming Gospel music whenever she came near. Despite shared origins, they "had this fear of me." Within months, Julia asked for a transfer, but in the meantime she went about her work, doing the best job she could, a work ethic which she derives from her Islamic faith. Later on, when the ladies saw the difference between Julia and other girls who went from boyfriend to boyfriend and discussed their love lives at work, their attitude thawed. One of the Gospel music hummers noticed her fasting during Ramadaan and approached her to tell her that she fasted too, as part of her own faith.

Naheed, a journalist, hasn't faced any specific problem, but finds that the current political climate can lead to some uncomfortable moments: "it can be very intimidating to walk into a newsroom where all the TV monitors (they're mounted overhead every couple of feet) are broadcasting the latest suicide bombing or al-Qaeda threat, and you're standing there in your headscarf looking like a deer caught in the headlights. Also, because it's a rarity to see someone like myself in that environment, people stare sometimes which can be uncomfortable."

Islamophobia from Muslims

Sadly, the fact that a country has a Muslim-majority population does not necessarily mean that it is "Islamic" in the sense that adhering to Islamic teachings is the norm and those who seek to live by Islamic precepts are encouraged, supported and protected. Those respondents who are living and working in Muslim countries have also faced discrimination for being practising Muslims.

Rabaa has faced "negative reactions in English-medium schools in the Middle East, which wished to present an image of modernity." But she feels that "if one worked professionally, this could be overcome."

A sister who lives in a secular Muslim country says: "There is huge discrimination when it comes to be[ing] employed if you are wearing hijab. But you are free to wear it if you have your own place. We cannot work with hijab at non-private hospitals as well."

Patricia says: "I've had more reaction from the people I've worked with here in Jordan. A sign of the times I suppose. A lot of people here are very misguidedly trying to prove how progressive they are by disassociating themselves from committed Muslims."

Patricia was fired by the Egyptian head of a section of UNICEF Jordan who told her that her English "wasn't what they were looking for!" which she found ironic, given that she is English and able to adapt to different styles of English as required in different situations and by employers in different countries.

The issue of discrimination from other Muslims in the workplace who have adopted a more "liberal" lifestyle and may be non-practising or hostile to those who take their religion seriously is something that is faced by Muslim workers both in Muslim countries and in the west.

Naheed found herself faced with such problems: "Frankly, I find negotiating the Muslims in my workplace to be trickier – it's like I'm too ethnic for them or I need liberating."

Racial issues within the Muslim community

It is sad to note that some sisters faced discrimination from within the Muslim community, based on their origins.²²

Hanan, as a white Muslim working in a diverse Muslim school where most families are of South Asian, Arab and African origin, did not experience any direct discrimination, but she found herself becoming distressed by the constant criticism she hears of her own country: "One lady said: 'I just want to ask you this question: do you think all people here are really bad? I find the people here are just evil, they're terrible people, do you find that?'"

Linda has also faced discrimination from the Muslim community: "I have to say that the most problems I experience are from Muslims having a bias against Muslim reverts living in the USA. In the communities nationality and language form barriers that are hard to bridge."

However, it is worth noting that out of 42 respondents, approximately half reported "no problems" with discrimination.

Saadia, a family physician, works in a small clinic with non-Muslim colleagues: "My colleagues and patients know I am Muslim and respect my religion. They are aware of what my religion prohibits, etc. I have never had to compromise my Islamic values, alhamdulillah."

"Flippant remarks" – how trivial are they really?

The sisters who commented on racism/Islamophobia identified a number of variations on this theme, ranging from "flippant remarks" to loss of jobs due to discrimination:

Losing a job is a serious blow, but even apparently trivial incidents can wear one down. It seems that the academic world is one in which snide comments are rife.

Jennifer, who is White, recalls a couple of such incidents:

"I remember a professor from Trinidad who pretended to be chummy with me after I became Muslim because I was now a member of a minority. Then he made remarks to the effect that my change of religion meant I was wishy-washy, and asked, 'If I start to levitate will you worship me?' – a comment that I found very offensive.

"In [one university where I worked], one of the profs had done her Anthropology thesis in the Sudan but the campus was prevalently White. I gave a talk there on hijab and the re-veiling movement. That prof was quite positive but a higher-up dean said, 'Are you going to say Allahu akbar?' in a mocking tone that I found quite offensive and stupid. But they are in a position of power so you cannot afford to say that you find a comment 'stupid'. You have to be careful. But don't let them walk all over you and don't let them get you down."

Hoda, an academic in the field of computer science, recalls an occasion where an Italian professor made offensive comments. One might have tried to brush them off as trivial, but her colleagues came to her defence and she also stood her ground, with a positive outcome:

"I attended a workshop in Switzerland. There was a professor from Italy. It was some sort of reception and I wasn't going to go because of the alcohol, but a group of people said let's have a table where there would be no alcohol. So I thought, they are making the effort, so I decided to go. No one at the table drank, out of respect. On our way back to the hotel the Italian professor – who was absolutely bombed, drunk – started on at me, 'What's wrong with a bit of alcohol?' because he saw that our table didn't drink out of respect. Who did I think I was, dressed the way I was?

I represented ignorance, who are you giving us talks and lectures? Everyone on the bus came to my defence, but I just had to let him have it! I told him that Europeans would still be in the dark ages if it wasn't for Muslims; Muslims taught Europeans how to bathe – he stunk! The next day he apologized to me. But I felt that I stood up for Muslim womanhood."

But it is important to keep a sense of perspective and not be "paranoid" about being a member of a religious minority. Being the "other" is not necessarily the issue, as Hoda found. On another occasion, she was given the brush-off by a professor at a conference, and she muses over the possible reasons for it – was it because of her being a Muslim woman in hijab, or for some other reason?

"Sometimes I would be talking to people who were well established in the field, to a group, and they wouldn't even look at me. I remember one prof ... it was almost as if he completely ignored me, as if I didn't exist. It was my very first conference in France and he was leading some sort of discussion group. When he opened the floor for questions I put up my hand and asked a question. Later on, I found out that this was unheard of, that a student (in the first year of a master's degree) would make a comment against this person's work so openly. I didn't realize this, I thought I was just making a comment; I didn't know the protocol of conferences. So part of me thinks he brushed me off because of that, not because I was a Muslim woman, but I don't know. The rest of the time when I would meet him at conferences he wouldn't give me the time of day. He was also Jewish. It could have been one of three things, or a combination. I am trying to think the best of him."

Hoda's thoughts on the issue are reflected in the advice of others not to internalize such things. Omayya, who works as a computer consultant in the corporate world, says, "I taught myself not to take it personally."

Jennifer, an academic, also urges sisters not to take it personally.

"You have to be strong. It's not always easy to respond to the flippant comments, but it is important not to take them personally or take them into yourself (internalize them)."

Doris tries to turn problems into something positive:

"Obstacles should be looked at for what they are – a bump in the road, not the end of the road. I try to learn from the obstacles – for instance, how can this obstacle help me move forward?"

Rabia, the diversity consultant, waxed quite eloquent about being able to speak the "same lingo as everyone else talks" which in her case is English and the jargon used in her field, and she stresses the importance of being comfortable and natural with people:

"Your differences don't have to be a barrier. Wearing hijab I do not consider to be a barrier. It may be a barrier for people wanting to work at The Gap and not wearing little skimpy attire, right? That's a whole industry thing, and that goes for anybody, anybody who doesn't dress a certain way in that crowd won't get hired. It has nothing to do with hijab, you have to appear a certain way. But for me wearing hijab is not a barrier to employment, I am willing to challenge anyone on it, because I have been consistently successfully employed, despite the race, despite the disability, despite the hijab, despite the gender. I think it's because I don't walk with a chip on my shoulder saying people are going to discriminate against me. I think many of us make the mistake of having a real chip on our shoulder and our attitude plays out when we're in an interview, when we're meeting with people, when we're communicating with people that aren't the same as us. We expect to be discriminated against, that comes across, and we are somehow not hired, but it's not because of the hijab, it's because of the attitude. Going in with a negative attitude, exactly, it plays out. If you're cold,

dry, bitter, that comes out when you're talking. I think it's my ability to communicate with people that puts people at ease and takes away all the imagery that they are first shocked with. They have to sit down and have a conversation with me to get over it."

How to cope: praying, answering back and speaking up

Prayer is, or should be, the first recourse for any Muslim who is faced with hardship or difficulty. When faced with discrimination in her business administration post, Nimat Marie reports that she coped by praying. Rosie converted whilst in her current job and there was a period of adjustment for both her and her colleagues. She also coped by means of "Prayer, prayer and more prayer!"

As well as praying to Allah for strength and guidance, Aaminah says that she will speak up and educate others if necessary. "No one gets by me with an ignorant or [prejudiced] comment without becoming educated by me!"

Khadija, who is both a postgraduate student and a teaching assistant in the religious studies field, is often astounded as "how prejudiced apparently intelligent people can be," and she likes to "turn the tables" on them when she can. When she asked a European professor who teaches at a Middle Eastern university a question about a paper he had presented, the man expressed surprise that "'someone who 'looks like you do could ask a critical question.' I gently asked him how he would feel if an Arab just assumed that since he is a European man, he must be lacking in moral values. We then had an interesting discussion about stereotypes."

Hijab

The majority of respondents in this survey wear hijab, i.e., most of them cover their heads and wear long, loose clothing. There is a widespread perception that wearing Islamic dress may hinder a woman who hopes to enter the workforce in western countries (and also, unfortunately, in some Muslim countries); this perception is confirmed in a Toronto-based study of women's experiences, "No Hijab Is Permitted Here" (2002), which explored the experiences of hijab-wearing Muslim women applying for work in the manufacturing, sales and service sectors.²³ However, the women whose stories are told here did not let prejudice or negative reactions stop them, and in some cases the hijab was a positive factor even in a non-Muslim work environment.

Home based sisters

Women whose work is home based may feel more freedom concerning how they dress. For Patricia, it is almost a non-issue, as she is a "telecommuter", working for US-based companies from her home in the Middle East. She remarks: "I really don't know if I would have been hired by everyone that has hired me from the US if they could see me! They don't ask and I don't tell them that I wear hijab. We were recently asked for photos to go with our articles by the company I work for, and I told them how I dress; they didn't bat an eyelid (so far)."

Sisters out in the workforce

Lori reminisces about her first steps in hijab: "When I first wore hijab, I was already working for a law firm as a legal secretary in Boston. It was very scary! There

were 250 lawyers, half of whom were Jews, so the first time I came to the office sporting my new scarf, my heart was pumping like a rabbit. My bosses (I worked for two associates) were mainly concerned with whether or not it would affect my work. I told them absolutely not, and thereafter they never commented. However, the bulk of the secretaries, who had previously invited me out to luncheons, stopped their invitations. Three of the girls continued to be friends with me, and then that's when I knew what it felt like to have real friends, not just someone who liked me because of the way I dressed or what impression I would make on others. After that, I was so proud to wear my hijab, because I knew who I was, and I think that attitude must be noticeable to others, because after that, I never have run into any situation where I felt I was disrespected... A few of the secretaries asked me why I wore hijab, but others just didn't ask and either ignored me or just treated me like a secretary and respected me for my skills as a secretary. In fact, I was requested by many of the lawyers to work overtime because I was good at my job."

Another heart-warming story of support in the workplace for a new hijabi comes from Noor. After struggling with family opposition to the hijab and empty promises of support from a former workplace, where objections were raised on the ground that a hijab-wearing employee would be "bad for business," Noor was given the opportunity to be interviewed for a position in a medical clinic.

"This time I approached things quite differently. I walked into my interview wearing a business-like tunic top and pants. I explained simply that I was a Muslim, I had a slightly different dress code than most of the employees and that I intended in the near future to add a headscarf to my ensemble. If they had a problem with that, there were no hard feelings and I would look elsewhere. Fortunately, they were more open-minded and I was hired."

After working for a while at the medical clinic, Noor felt that she had been there long enough to gain support from her co-workers and bosses:

"They all knew of my desire to dress as a Muslim woman. The day I returned from Friday prayer wearing my scarf, my fellow executive secretaries cheered! Another female administrator showed her support by declaring that if anyone gave me a hard time they would have to answer to her. Some days later when the CEO passed by me in the hallway, he winked and asked if I was cold! Total acceptance from the top down. I was only one of three Muslim employees in the company and the only female."

Another story of putting on hijab in the workplace comes from Salma, who works in marketing:

"When I started the position I was fairly new to Islam and didn't wear hijab, I started nearly a year later. The reaction was very diverse. A lot of people took kind interest and asked me many questions, some people who spoke with me before, stopped, some people were nicer to me than before... there was a lot of mixed reaction. My position is almost 50 percent sourcing out suppliers and negotiating contracts so my 'edge' was somewhat lost because I looked a lot more submissive in their eyes. But it only took them a few meetings to realize that nothing changed, and I was still the same."

Fatma finds that hijab is a help in the dental practice where she works, as the dentist and many of his patients are Muslim; her boss is happy to accommodate her and the Muslim patients are happy to be seen by a Muslim woman who wears hijab and understands them.

Occasionally there will be a patient who looks uncomfortable; in that case Fatma asks the receptionists to speak to the person and sort things out; she cheerfully notes that the patients have every right to be seen by a person who makes them feel comfortable.

Omayya, the computer consultant, has worn hijab since the age of 14. She says: "It's part of me, I don't think it had any negative effect. At the beginning it was a little strange, since I was the only one with hijab in the building. Co-workers weren't as comfortable dealing with me, it took time for them to get to know me. And now hijab is a non issue."

As for dealing with the negative reactions, Omayya says: "Patience, understanding their position, helped me a lot. I believe that discrimination is an act of ignorance, and the only way it could [sic] be fought and defeated is by education. So I took on that route, and started to educate the people around me about hijab, and Islam, and what I can and cannot do etc. I also showed interest in learning about their own culture/religion, in order to refine my approach in dealing with them."

Jamilla finds that hijab is a help in her post as an assistant professor of religion: "It helps very much... diversity is valued so I think they like that I wear hijab; as a professor of Islam, my hijab signals authority and knowledge of my subject."

On the other hand, Khadija, who is also in the academic field, ruminates on the issue of wearing hijab in an Islamic studies department: "I would say that it has hindered me in the sense that people tend to assume that I'm not very bright when they first encounter me. However, since I don't conform to that stereotype, once we can get past the initial encounter, people are unlikely to forget having met me! Who knows, this might work to my advantage when looking for work after graduation.

"Having to deliberately present myself in ways which make clear that I am not stupid has made me think a lot about prejudice and how it powerfully shapes the sort of academic experience students have. I realize that I have done my best academic work in classes where I was sure that the professor accepted me as I am, fully respected

me, and was clearly confident that I could do worthwhile research. Therefore, I have become strongly committed to equal human rights for all people, regardless of colour, class, beliefs, gender, disability or any other difference. I believe that it is only when people know that they are fully accepted and respected that they can grow to become whatever God intends them to be. So I try to be as accepting and supportive of others as such professors have been of me.

"Some are quite accepting, some are apprehensive, some ask personal questions. However, most people don't comment directly on my dress. Instead, my hijab is kind of like 'the elephant in the room,' which everyone knows is there. It shapes our interactions, but is often unmentionable. People's discomfort with what I wear tends to come out indirectly, through comments about my intelligence, English speaking ability (English is my first language!), or ideas."

Tricky issues: adhering to Islamic parameters

The workplace, especially in the West but also in Muslim countries, may appear to be a minefield of tricky issues ranging from finding a place to pray, to mixing in the workplace to the social aspect of the working life, which in the west often involves alcohol. There are also matters such as the all-pervasive "holiday" atmosphere at the end of the year, which despite attempts to make it inclusive and reflective of diversity, focuses mostly on Christmas (or the secularized and commercialized version of it that now prevails) and, in some parts of the world, Hanukkah.

Women who were working in Muslim countries and those working from their homes found these to be less of an issue. Sisters in western workplaces found themselves fielding many questions and finding out who their real friends and supporters were among their colleagues.

• Prayer

As the foundation of faith (*'imaad al-deen*), prayer is an important issue in the daily life of the Muslim, and one which sometimes poses a challenge for the working Muslim. Those who work at home faced no problems on this score, such as Widad who, when asked about work and prayer replied that she had "no prayer issues to report about."

Women whose work is partially home based also have no problems at the times when they are working at home. Fatma, who has a home-based business and also works part-time as a dental assistant, says that as her boss is a Muslim, there are no problems about praying at work, and it is a simple matter to pray in between appointments with patients.

Naheed and Pamela, who both work as freelances, find it more of a challenge when they are on assignment. They schedule appointments and interviews so as to avoid conflicts with prayer times, and find space wherever they can to offer prayers when they are out and about. When Naheed goes into the radio studio, which is rather small, it is not always easy to find room, but she usually succeeds. Pamela carries what she calls a "neat sheet" in her car so that she can be assured that whatever spot she finds to pray in, she will have a clean, dry surface.

Women who work in the same place every day are usually able to find a regular spot for their prayers. Those who have their own offices are able to close the door and put up a "Do Not Disturb" sign, as Aaminah did in one of her jobs. As a Nursing Practitioner, Julia has a flexible schedule which allows her to plan time for prayers during her workday.

Those who do not have their own office or who work in open-plan work spaces have to be a little more creative. Empty classrooms, offices and conference rooms are favourite spots, as noted by Howeida, who will often pray

in the office of a colleague in her engineering department who has already finished work for the day and left.

Hoda reports that she has never had a problem praying at work. When she was a post-doctoral fellow, her work was on campus so she was able to use the MSA prayer room. When working at IBM she shared an office with a colleague but the qiblah faced the door and she did not want to "trap" her colleague by praying there and blocking access to the door, so she would pray in the conference room. Her colleagues were aware of her religious commitment and if they happened to walk in on her praying, they would simply walk out again.

During a summer job as a student, Hoda found herself working in a large open-plan office. She asked about a spot to pray and was entrusted with the key to a dusty storage room containing valuables, which she had to pick up from the secretary and return every day.

Some workplaces provide space for their Muslim employees to pray. Felldelah reports that in Capetown, South Africa, the large corporation for which she works provides a large multi-faith prayer space that Muslim workers are able to use. Julia reports that the hospital where she works allows Muslim staff, visitors and patients to use a corner of the on-site Christian chapel, which is not always ideal. She has been invited to sit on the hospital's spiritual care advisory board and plans to ask the hospital to provide a multi-faith prayer room. In the meantime she has been instrumental in reserving a room for Jumu'ah prayers to be held regularly on-site for Muslim employees and patients.

Those who work in Islamic organizations have no worries about finding a place to pray, although Pamela reports that as prayers were always held in congregation in the organization where she worked, it was sometimes difficult to drop whatever she was doing in order to go and pray at the scheduled time; in her role as a writer, the flexibility of

working alone as a freelance is a little easier. Another hazard of working in an Islamic organization is the awkwardness that stems from well-meaning male colleagues asking about why one isn't praying today, although Pamela states that they soon learned not to ask!

Most of the women report no serious problems with finding a place to pray, whether they notified their bosses and colleagues about it or simply sought out a quiet corner of the workplace. Aaminah states that in one job she was asked not to pray in a corner of the conference room because if a client were to come in and see her, it would "look bad". This company also did not allow her to wear hijab at work so she made plans to leave and ignored their "ban" in the meantime.

Making time for prayer is usually not a problem in the summer, when days are longer, but it can be a challenge in the shorter days of winter, when even Maghrib may be affected by commute times. Naheed and Aaminah both mention that it can be difficult to fit prayers in to the work day during the winter, although Aaminah reminds us of the concession allowing us to join prayer together.²⁴

Performing wudoo' is another issue that may be problematic in the workplace, especially when the washroom sinks may be visible from the corridor or when a woman feels shy about taking off her hijab in front of non-Muslim colleagues, or when colleagues react with consternation upon finding someone putting their feet in the sink. These issues may be dealt with by availing oneself of the concession which allows wiping over the socks and the headcover for up to 24 hours (72 hours in the case of travelling), if one has done wudoo' before putting them on.

The majority of women whom I interviewed found that being up front with colleagues, without being aggressive, brought positive results and allowed them to combine the religious duty of prayer with their work duties. However,

some respondents reported some concerns about praying in workplaces where colleagues were "not friendly to overt expression of faith" (Naheed) or in a place that was designated as a "secular space".

Women who want to work must be prepared to face this hurdle and be creative in finding space and time to pray at work. They should calmly reassure bosses and colleagues that it will not detract from their performance or time put in at work.

- *Interaction with male colleagues*

Although many women will seek women-only or female-dominated work places, interaction with male colleagues or bosses is almost inevitable in most jobs. Contrary to certain cultural practices, Islam does not insist that women seal themselves off and have no contact with men whatsoever. Doing business is one of several areas where interaction is permitted between a woman and a non-mahram man. However it is important to note that Islamic rules regulate mixing when it is required:

Hoda, who has worked in the computer industry where many of her colleagues were male, says:

"With regard to Islam, in terms of interaction between men and women, I think that's why we have all these rules and regulations of how to dress and how to behave, to allow interaction. It doesn't mean that we don't interact at all – we do – but as long as we know what the limitations are... that is something I think a lot of people forget. Segregation in some situations is important – like in a social setting, I prefer to be in this [i.e. segregated] environment. But if I am not in a segregated setting then I have the tools to allow me to interact in the best possible way, because Allah is All Wise and we know from the Qur'an and from Sunnah how to behave. The way our voice should be, where our eyes

should be looking, the way we should be dressed..."

Within those guidelines – hijab, rules on physical contact and guidelines on how to conduct oneself – Muslim women who have male colleagues at work are finding ways to work with men and still adhere to Islamic parameters.

• *Attitude*

Adopting a down to earth and businesslike attitude is the first step.

When asked about mixing with men at work, Doris pointed out:

"I don't 'mix' with men – I just work with them. Muslim men work with women, so I don't see what the issue is. The fact that I wear hijab is actually very helpful in this regard. I don't want to do anything that would give people the wrong impression of my values, and wearing the hijab makes it easier for me to keep to my values."

Jasminka points to the necessity of setting boundaries and conducting oneself in a manner that deters any inappropriate approaches from the outset:

"I do not have difficulty dealing with men – I set my boundaries, do not laugh at inappropriate jokes, and rebuff any attempts at flirtation with as much subtlety as I can muster. Generally, I think I carry myself in such a way that men know to treat me respectfully."

Omayya is very firm on the matter: "I mix with men only in a professional matter, which means business meetings." Any meetings are scheduled quite strictly, with an agenda. "In business time is money, so wasting time means wasting money. So I limit my interaction with men down to as much as it is needed to do the task at hand." Omayya avoids giving any impression that she might want to socialize with them, but does so in a manner that is diplomatic and tactful. "And they do understand."

Aaminah finds that her work places her in contact with men a great deal of the time, and is striving to make sure that all interactions are appropriate. She finds that her colleagues are supportive and understanding:

"I am forced to mix with men all the time. I try to avoid shaking hands, but sometimes it is necessary. My office is aware and supportive of this. I do not attend a meeting with a man, alone, without another person present, ever. Most of what I do are group type things. If not, my office door is left open so that there is no opportunity for anything."

Felldelah notes that she has no problem talking to men, "as long as they don't touch my hand or shoulder. They have more respect for the women in the long dresses."

Zuhra notes: "Because of my chosen field of work [as a tutor working with adults who want to enter the childcare field] I have not had to do much of this. Although I do have male colleagues with whom I relate well. I do observe my Islamic etiquette."

Salima makes use of technology to send e-mails instead of meeting with colleagues face to face. She also emphasizes the importance of being upfront with colleagues:

"The trick is letting everyone know where you stand beforehand. If you communicate that you are uncomfortable in certain situations, then you have a better chance at coming up with a solution that is good for all parties."

• *Environment*

Some women found that the environment in the workplace made a difference, and in some jobs it seems that interactions are more likely to be somewhat distant and focused on the work only.

Naheed found that in the radio journalism environment, "men generally tend to be distant to start off with anyway

and if you don't give them any real encouragement then it's not difficult maintaining a business type interaction."

Julia states that in her nursing job, "mixing with men doesn't really happen." She notes that there are a small percentage of nurses who are male, "but how you work with them is very segregated. As a bedside nurse most of the day is spent with patients; doctors come on the floor, they talk to you for maybe 30 seconds." As a Nurse Practitioner, she talks with doctors because she is managing their patients: "so I am taking directions from them or updating them. So I am on the phone or e-mailing them, or doing rounds in hospital with them. But physical contact is not there. We're on a first name basis but there's respect ... To me there is professional distance, I don't have to work at that, it's just there."

Another nurse, Anna, points out that her colleagues in a children's hospital are mostly women. There is "one male social worker, one male psychiatrist." But it is "a very professional relationship. No joking around; it's not proper at work with parents and kids around."

On the farm, Erica sometimes deals with a neighbouring farmer who leases some of their land. She says that most of the time when he comes, his wife is with him and usually there is no need for direct interaction: "He just does his own thing, farms the land, no need to come to the house; he just gets on with it." Erica is also homeschooling her children, most of whom are teens, so there is always someone around to fulfil the "mahram" role.

Working in a Muslim organization, Jennifer finds that the way things are set up makes it convenient for men and women to interact within Islamic bounds:

"Whilst I am aware that there are different points of view among Muslims on this matter, I am very comfortable with the policy at [my place of employment]. Both men and women work there, and we will talk to one another and meet if required for business purposes. The office doors are

always open and the offices all have big (internal) windows so there is no seclusion. Everyone dresses properly and understands hijab. There is no shaking hands and in the lunchroom men sit on one side and women on the other."

- *Shaking hands with men*

Although it should be noted that the Islamic view is that any physical contact between a man and a woman who are not married to one another or close blood relatives (mahrams) is haram, in real life the ideal is sometimes not so easy to maintain. The issue in question here is the handshake, which is of significance in western working culture, where a refusal to shake hands is particularly offensive and is likely to lead to hurt feelings and misunderstandings. Working Muslim women have given much thought to this matter and to the fine line that they must tread between adhering to Islamic teachings and "fitting in" in the workplace.

Many sisters said that they shake hands if the man offers his hand first, because they don't want to hurt people's feelings or cause offence that may reflect badly on Muslims or result in negative consequences (such as in a job interview). At the same time, they make sure that they are not the first one to offer their hand. Another favourite strategy is to make sure the hands are "busy" by having notes or some other object in one's hand.

Ouardah spells it out: "If someone gives me his hand I will shake hands, but I won't give my hand." If she gets the opportunity to know colleagues better, she will explain her point of view on shaking hands. "Then they ask why did you shake hands the first time? I say: Well I can't shock you or hurt your feelings!"

Jennifer also tackles the issue and laments how some Muslims place what she sees as an exaggerated emphasis on its importance, whilst failing to acknowledge a Muslim

woman's achievements:

"Another tricky issue is shaking hands. My policy is to be aware of the context. If I feel that the situation allows it, I will keep my hand down, smile, and say, 'Sorry, I don't shake hands.' However this policy can sometimes backfire quite horribly. So I go by context and weigh the priorities.

"I recently met the head of race relations for the [local police department] who held out his hand. I chose to shake his hand so as not to cause offence, and I plan to tell him in a subsequent meeting that, by the way, it is preferable not to shake hands. It is important not to cause offence and also to spread awareness of such issues.

"At my PhD graduation ceremony, I was aware that I was on campus where differences would be honoured. I informed the usher that I would rather not shake hands with the president of the university and asked her to convey the message. I also had the option of declining to bow to the president, as is the custom, because of religious reasons. When I stepped up to the president I said, 'Sorry, I don't shake hands,' he respected that, and offered his congratulations and best wishes.

"There were some Muslims in the audience who said that they were so proud that Jennifer didn't shake hands. I was annoyed that this was taken as being so important that my character was judged by that and that this was the comment made – no comments about being proud that a woman in hijab had earned a PhD or acquired learning. My Islamic commitment was being judged on this basis and I resent that, even though I happened to come out on the 'right' side of the judgement in this case."

Hoda also raises the issues of causing offence and noting who has the "power" in a given situation, such as an interview or a meeting with a prospective supervisor. Like other sisters, she suggests avoiding causing offence, and explaining our point of view later on: "You have to make

some compromises to build bridges, then educate them about what is OK and what is not." She "will shake hands the first time, then if I work with them repeatedly I will let them know."

She also tells the story of a friend "who was doing a PhD in physics and she was meeting a professor for the first time, and he put out his hand. She took her scarf and put her scarf between her hand on his so it wasn't skin on skin contact. And he told her he was so offended by that, he felt it was as if he had germs on his hands. It was her first lesson in realizing that we're in a situation where this is a common practice here [in the West], and people don't mean anything by it. You also have to weigh it up: you don't want to offend him either, because he's the professor, he has power, and you're applying or just starting out..."

Mira also advocates compromise followed by educating others. She also suggests "avoiding situations that will compromise Islamic values" and in the case of handshaking in particular: "keep your hands busy, don't reach out. If someone reaches out and grabs your hand, then it's over, nothing I can do now. But don't make it happen." She recommends compromise rather than alienating others. "Try not to be rude, abrupt, offensive."

On the other hand, Patricia speaks of setting the ground rules for oneself and others, and having a confident attitude when meeting with men in professional situations:

"I'm totally in control when I occasionally meet with clients (wa Alhamdulillah). I do realize that this is a blessing from Allah, and partly to do with confidence that one attains with age, but as a freelance consultant, I set the rules firmly for my non-practicing Muslim clients as well as non-Muslim clients. I touch my heart in a gesture of warmth and friendship, while smiling. I state firmly that I don't shake hands as a Muslim. It has always worked for me and so far no one has been offended: there have been

slightly embarrassing moments, but no confrontation. I have observed that things don't always go so well for my sisters if they appear unsure of themselves. Dithering about confuses the other party and leads to embarrassment and hurt feelings.

"Recently I went with my husband to the UK for a series of conferences with NGOs and meetings with the media regarding the political situation between the West and the Middle East. We met a wide variety of representatives including a member of the House of Lords who received us in his private offices (and CNN's Christiane Amanpour). My presence as the only woman in the party meant that I was solely responsible for setting the tone for myself throughout, but I like to think that because I dealt with it firmly yet politely, I didn't cause offence and even individuals of note who are used to being treated with ultra-respect accepted my stance graciously.

"I feel very strongly that if a woman doesn't feel she has the personal strength to deal with these situations without compromising her religious beliefs then she should avoid them, even if it damages her career. If you obey Allah He will make things easy for you."

Problems

Sadly, problems do arise in the workplace, as is well known, but most of the women I spoke to had not faced any kind of harassment or inappropriate behaviour on the part of their colleagues.

One sister had a problem with a man in the workplace who addressed her with what she felt was an inappropriate endearment, although he saw nothing wrong with it. She told me:

"One time, someone used to call me 'my baby' at work ... I didn't answer him. Whenever he calls me 'my baby', I don't answer him. I don't answer him, for 3 or 4 times. Then I went to him, politely, and told him I'm not your baby. First, I am not a baby. Second, I am not your baby. Third I have two very nice names, so call me by any of them, call me [last name] or call me [first name], whichever you want. He said why are you saying like this? For other women, it is harmless to be called like this [sic]. I said: I am not like other women, this is me... if you don't stop, you will get in trouble. So he stopped."

• *Christmas*

For those who work at home or in the Muslim world, Christmas may not be an issue, but in the Western world Christmas is the major celebration of the year and there is no avoiding it. The stores fill up with Christmas goods months before December 25 and the TV and other media are full of "Christmas specials" and other reminders of the season. The workplace is not immune either, and one could hardly expect it to be. From greetings to parties and gift-giving, the festive season presents a number of challenges for Muslim workers, for whom it is not a time of celebration.

Dealing with festive greetings is an issue not just for those in the workplace, but for anyone who goes shopping or deals with any businesses or stops to say hello to a neighbour. At a time when many people are in a celebratory mood, it seems churlish to spurn their good wishes. But in view of the fact that many scholars discourage congratulating non-Muslims on their religious festivals, this is an area where Muslims have to tread a fine line between adhering to Islamic teachings whilst also maintaining good relationships with others.

Anna handles it in a straightforward and diplomatic manner: "If someone says 'Merry Christmas', I say 'Thank you and the same to you', but I don't initiate it." If people ask what she is doing for the holidays, "I gently remind them that I am Muslim and I don't celebrate it, but I will ask them how they are doing with their shopping and so on." Anna also lets her colleagues know about her own holidays, and makes sure to book time off work so that she can attend the local Eid prayers.

The "office Christmas party" is a veritable institution in the western world; sometimes it is known as an occasion when people lose their inhibitions and behave in ridiculous ways that are unacceptable at any other time of year. In some workplaces, no one minds if an employee chooses not to attend, but in others attendance is expected if not required, and non-attendance may be taken as a sign of snobbishness and "lack of team spirit". But going to the office or department Christmas party may also put Muslims in an uncomfortable position as they are likely to be faced with alcohol, music, dancing and social mixing. Muslim women have worked out a number of ways to deal with the issue of festivities in the workplace.

Jennifer did not have to deal with such issues when working for an Islamic organization, but in the academic world it poses quite a challenge:

"The department Christmas party is quite a stumbling block. If you do not go at all, there is a sense that 'you are not one of us, not part of the team.' Muslims should maintain good relationships with others. I used to go for the beginning of the party, at the time when any speeches would be given. I found it difficult because of the mixing, especially as the room grew more crowded and it was hard to avoid bumping into others. But I felt it was important to go, for the sake of da'wah and to demonstrate that even though I had converted [to Islam], it did not mean that I was

dropping out of normal life. I would stay until the room got very crowded, then move to an outer room where one could still be regarded as being in attendance. I would stay for a 'respectable' amount of time – an hour or so, then leave.

...

"Yes, this was a compromise but I feel it comes under the heading of the *fiqh* of priorities. I felt that maintaining good relations with non-Muslim colleagues and avoiding causing offence or doing things that may lead to them hating us for being 'standoffish' was more important than my avoiding the gathering altogether. This was my own personal *ijtihad*. I recall the story of Ibn Taymiyah and a companion walking somewhere at night and encountering a group of drunken [Mongol] soldiers. His companion wanted to rebuke them but Ibn Taymiyah told him to let them be, because the alternative was that they may be pillaging or raping, and their drunken rowdiness was the lesser of two evils. So I believe we can make our own *ijtihad* when working out how to deal with tricky issues."

Ouardah's simple solution: "I don't go. Don't tell them why. Just don't show up." Charlette also doesn't attend and says that it is understood among her co-workers. Shariah says likewise, her co-workers know that she doesn't drink or celebrate the holidays.

The wise approach is to assess the culture of one's workplace. If team work is deemed essential and absence from such functions may affect one's position, then as Jennifer suggested, it may be prudent to attend for the briefest time possible, attending at the beginning and leaving before the party really gets under way. In workplaces where there is less importance attached to such matters, then like Ouardah, Charlette and Shariah, one can easily not attend, without making any fuss or leading to any ramifications.

On the other hand, there is the activist approach, which means getting involved in organizing the events and thus

having a say in what kind of party it is and whether alcohol is served or not. Hoda was one of those who had taken this approach and spoke at length about it:

Hoda says:

"I was always the activist, I would say no Christmas party, let's have a year end or winter party, with no alcohol. I felt it was really important. I took part in organizing because I felt that if I organized them I could change them, and one of the most important things to change was alcohol, the presence of alcohol. Not surprisingly, soon after I left the department they went back to [serving alcohol]. They didn't like it but I felt there were a lot of Muslims in the department, and ... essentially by having alcohol present they were denying us access to the party and I felt it was very important for the Muslims to interact with non-Muslims. I believe in that because that is how they get to know us, so I decided to organize these things and say no alcohol ...

"It's not that I really wanted to go to these parties, but I felt that they were not taking us into consideration. And who's they? The organizers, so why didn't I become one of the organizers? Believe me I don't have this thing about going to winter parties at all, it was just that I felt that instead of complaining about it, why not do something? They were just a bunch of students who organize it, well I'm a student, I can organize it."

• *Gift giving*

In some workplaces, in addition to parties there is also the issue of gift giving. It is very common in some settings for employees to exchange Christmas gifts. Both Mira and Anna, with work experience in hospital settings, have had to deal with this issue.

Mira explains to her colleagues before Christmas that she doesn't participate in Christmas, although as a Muslim she

respects Jesus as a Prophet. She says "I give people gifts throughout the year anyways, it doesn't have to be a special day." If a colleague gives her a gift, "I just say thank you, I appreciate your care," then when Eid and Ramadaan come, she returns the favour: "during Ramadan I will bring the food and ask them to break the fast with me, or whatever, or I would give gifts at any other time."

Anna says: "I don't participate. They do the 'secret Santa'²⁵ thing and I don't participate. It has been a bit odd at times but I still say no."

• *Alcohol and social gatherings*

Social gatherings connected to work may take place at times other than Christmas, and in some fields a lot of business is done in such settings. This leads us to another issue that is prevalent in the western world, namely alcohol. It is no big deal for most non-Muslim westerners to have a drink of beer or wine at any social gathering, including gatherings connected to work. In fact, many non-Muslim people find it odd if there is no alcohol at a party or gathering. This, of course, presents a stumbling block for Muslims who not only do not drink, but are forbidden by Islam to serve drinks or even be around people who are drinking.

Omayya tackled the matter early on by making sure that "co-workers got the message that I do not drink alcohol. I took the time to explain why, in terms that is respectful to them, and myself." Added to this approach was making friends with ladies at work who also did not drink: "And from there on, I would be with those ladies at events, which meant that alcohol wouldn't be at the table that I am on."

Salima says that she does not attend, and notes that there are plenty of people in her workplace who don't attend social gatherings at work: "Even before becoming a Muslim I did not attend these types of gatherings, simply because

I feel that I see these people 45 hours a week – why would I want to spend my Friday or Saturday night with them as well? A lot of people feel like this.”

As well as getting involved in organizing parties around Christmas time, as we have seen above, Hoda also helped to organize other events so that she could have a say in whether or not alcohol was available. She faced a little resistance, however:

“Most resistance came from faculty members who had been in the department year after year after year, and they were used to getting their free booze at the party. ... I tried to help organize a new grad student retreat. Typically new grad students would choose a prof to work with who had the most funding, and that’s a really silly way to choose who you are going to work with, so I thought at the beginning of the year we could host a retreat where the current grad students would give talks about their research areas [to] the new grad students ... at that retreat I again said there would be no alcohol. Some faculty members objected, said it was ridiculous, there should always be a cheese and wine [party] at the beginning of the year. We had a hall and there was a bar in another part of the building, and I didn’t want any of our funds going for booze, so we just said a cash bar. The program officially ended at a certain time and if people wanted to drink there would be a cash bar somewhere else – if they couldn’t do without their booze. What I found out – because I left after [the program] was done – was that not many stayed around, just a few faculty members! But that was a compromise, even just putting it down in the program, saying ‘5 pm onwards, cash bar.’ I couldn’t bring myself to do it... but I said it was a compromise.”

Rabia also got involved with organizing things on the social front:

“I’ve been in a situation where I was with this family group where I was in a leadership position. They got some funding

and they said, we have to celebrate it; we'll have a party and get some cake and champagne. I was confident enough to sit there and say, 'Folks, I'll have to refrain from these decisions, my vote's out, you guys decide on your own, simply because I don't drink nor in my faith are we allowed to serve liquor, so I don't want to be involved in this decision process.' ... Because this is public turf and public territory, it's not your personal space. I'm not going to tell someone in their personal space what to do but it's public space and I'm involved in the decision making process and it's public money, I have the right to express what is more inclusive to me. So when I said that, they all had to contextualize it for themselves, so one person said, 'Oh, maybe we need a licence to serve', 'Oh, I wouldn't want to be responsible if someone had too much' and so on. Then they said, 'Oh, we'll get non-alcoholic champagne!'

"[It was] a process of justifying it in their own terms, couldn't just accept it, had to put it in their context. But they did, and the beauty of it was they did."

Naheed also takes a proactive approach to work gatherings: "I'm pretty good at circumventing stuff like that. i.e. working lunch? Let's go to the Pita Pit or something where there's no alcohol. I find people are pretty good about it."

Suggestions to meet at a pub were fielded in a pro-active manner by Jennifer during her university days:

"If it was suggested that we meet at a pub – such as a get-together to welcome new graduate students – I would say that I couldn't go there, and try to negotiate a better venue. They were usually open to that and we would go to a café or some such. I would ... stay for a short while, then leave."

Felldelah may attend a meeting in such places, but will not eat or drink there: "Going to places where alcohol is served, I abstain. Personally I will not eat, or drink from a place that serves alcohol."

Doris is not faced with this issue in the fields in which she works. The participants in the tours that she organizes are non-Muslims who may want to drink during their trip, but Doris says: "I make it clear that I don't drink, I don't offer them drinks, nor do I know where they can buy alcohol. I tell them (nicely of course), that they are basically on their own in terms of finding out where they can buy a drink in Morocco."

When Erica was working in graphic design, the company she worked for was having a party for their clients. She did not want to attend because she knew that there would be drinking and dancing, but she met her employers halfway by helping them with preparations:

"I said I can't come to this party because there will be drinking and dancing. I said I would help prepare for it, make some hors d'oeuvres, then when people started arriving, I left. My boss didn't like it. I had two bosses, a husband and wife team, and the female gave me a harder time than him. They didn't like it: I was the assistant production manager and I should have been there. I just said I can't stay, there's going to be drinking and dancing and it's not appropriate for me, so I left. I just told them that's the way it is... and they didn't want to lose me so they let it go."

One sister noted that she is blessed in that people in her workplace are not so eager to have alcohol at working lunches or other functions. She has not had to "fight for her rights", as this has been the workplace ethos for a long time:

"Everyone, including our Board of Directors is aware that I will not be anywhere where alcohol is served. Fortunately, they all agree that it is wrong to drink while working anyway. This is a pretty conservative agency actually. I have also been open that I am a recovered alcoholic, and they have supported my husband during his recovery so

they are sensitive to this. Our Associate Director is 100 percent opposed to alcohol as well, so they have been this way for years, even before I came on."

Julia notes that as most social events take place in the hospital, there is no alcohol served. Sometimes she may be invited to a co-worker's house when there is a wedding or a new baby. "Most of the time I make an appearance but I don't stay, that's how I deal with it." As she has risen in her field, she has found that her presence or absence at such events matters: "... now that I am in a leadership role it has weight to it when I appear somewhere and when I don't appear. ... So I make an appearance. ... I have a line that I don't go over in socializing but I do put in an appearance. Go early and leave early."

Mira also advocates putting in an appearance and showing that "you are part of the community. ... If you want to make an excuse, say you have another appointment, have to pick up the kids, that's fine, at least put in an appearance. Say hello, walk around for a couple of minutes, then leave." She also points out that in a large organization, there are bound to be others who don't like to drink or tell rowdy jokes, so you can find those people and perhaps sit with them. "If drinking is going on you don't have to sit at the table."

In nursing, Mira remembers that her colleagues would often get together for a meal to wind down after a busy shift, and they would invite her to join them.

"I would say, 'Well, guys, you know me, you cannot be drinking if I come, so if you want to have fun and drink and be stupid, go ahead, I can't come.' So they would say, 'OK, we won't drink.' So they want you to be in their company, if you are a pleasant person and they like you and they want to be in your company, give them that choice, if you want me to come don't drink, so they would say OK, we won't drink for that time. Then you go."

Furkan, who lives and works in a secularized Muslim country, notes the following:

"They plan 'wine and cheese' parties at the end of the day at a long conference. I never attended but if I did, I would ask for orange juice."

General comments about tricky issues

Lori, who has worked both outside and inside the home, notes the following:

"By working at home, all of [these problems] are virtually eliminated. However, I have worked in other positions that these issues arose. As for mixing with men, in the workplace, it can hardly be avoided on a professional, not social, level. I do believe that there is nothing wrong with working in the same company as other men as long as you follow the guidelines, such as proper hijab, only conversing where work issues are concerned, and never being alone with a man in an office with the door closed. Social occasions are strictly avoided by politely refusing and taking the opportunity to make da'wah, explaining some of the intricacies of the prohibition of alcohol and the mixing of men and women."

Noor reflects on her experience in the western working world, and also the situation in the Islamic company that she and her husband set up in the US:

"In an Islamic workplace these issues are not as difficult. I think again Muslim women need to be frank and open about our values without proselytizing. I don't shake hands with men for example. A simple gesture such as touching my hand to my heart with a smile and explanation that I don't shake hands is usually enough. Some men don't like it but that is not my problem. Often they are surprised but it is really all about education. The more we Muslims discuss who we are politely and reasonably, the more people will

eventually come to understand and accept us.

"People who do not smoke don't seem to have a problem asking clients or colleagues to refrain. Someone who is a recovering alcoholic will certainly not want to sit with others who are drinking. If these people are not shy to make their wants known, why can't we? We have the right to set our limits and must remember that we answer to Allah first. Allah is the Razzaaq (Provider) and the One who provided us with this job in the first place. You may need to be a pioneer in your company but think of the benefit your first steps will gain. You will receive a lot of *hassenat* (reward) in that you opened a door or made it easier for those who will follow you."

The future: Opportunities for advancement

The sisters were asked what they felt were the opportunities for advancement in their various fields, and whether being a woman and/or member of a minority was an obstacle to progress.

The business owners felt that there were few obstacles. Noor, Fatma and Omayya all expressed the feeling that "the sky's the limit." Salima notes that "As a business owner, growth is as large as you yourself can envision" and Noor comments that it is "all based on abilities and work ethics." Both Salima and Munira saw potential for growth in their businesses and were working towards that goal – at the time of the survey, Munira was planning to take her leather goods to international trade fairs, a leap up from the national level.

Doris spoke in detail of her experiences and aspirations for her two small businesses:

"I would say in what I have chosen to do now, the opportunities are endless, if you use your creativity. I wouldn't say that they will all result in great money making

opportunities, but for now, they are giving me what I want. Travel to Muslim countries is a little harder to sell than other countries I imagine; however, I have started small, using my network of friends to promote my businesses. I do not have a lot of money for marketing, so I really don't know where things could go if I had the finances."

Addressing the issue of how easy or otherwise it is for women and minorities to progress, Doris says:

"I think this is a difficult question for me to assess. My use of English is pretty good, when I speak to people on the phone, they usually can tell I am not the "usual" minority. In fact, they probably wouldn't know I was a Muslim. They probably think I am just married to one. I have generally not had too much problem when people meet me. I've done food shows to try to promote my oil and nobody has even blinked when they see me wearing a scarf. The people who have come with me on the trips have not been concerned because I wear a scarf (trip participants have so far been non-Muslim). In fact, the fact that I am a Muslim has given them opportunity to get to know a Muslim much better. I had forgotten my prayer rug when we visited Morocco this year, and one of the participants promptly went out and bought me one because she felt bad I had been praying on a towel."

Erica offers advice to those who are thinking of going into farming, noting that "no one can make a real living at farming anymore. They just do it for their own family's needs and sell a little to friends. You need money behind you to start up. Farm equipment is expensive –\$100,000 for a tractor, \$200,000 for a combine. It is more realistic to consider hobby farming. One spouse or both will need a job off-farm. Market gardening may be more profitable..."

Women wanting to go into business may be able to find support in the community, through government programs for women and minorities, and other sources. Salima notes

that there are many such programs available in Canada. Local libraries, business centres and information centres are good places to start looking.

- *Writing/publishing/journalism*

The sisters who are involved in writing, publishing and journalism suggest that with talent, a good grasp of language and initiative, any woman may succeed in these fields. Patricia notes: "Writing is a field where it is truly talent that counts. If you're good, you'll succeed. Good writers and editors are always in demand."

Lori notes that there are plenty of opportunities in the editing field, and laments the many examples she sees where publishers have not used the skills of people with a sound knowledge of the language: "I think the field is wide open for anyone who has a good grasp of their native tongue. Unfortunately, I see so much written material that would be that much better had an editor or proof-reader gotten a hold of it and cleaned it up."

Sara points out the difference between writing for the mass market and writing what you really want to write, and muses the possibility of self-publishing.

"(The opportunity for advancement) very much depends on whether you aim to appeal to the mass market and tailor your writing for that market or whether you are prepared to write what you want to write and pray it finds its audience. I am of the second group. I suppose for many writers the next step up would be to establish your own publishing house. Perhaps in sha Allah that's a project for the future but as yet I know very little about the world of publishing. Once published and thus labelled as a writer there is a pressure to keep writing new books so as not to be a 'one book wonder'. For a Muslim writer there is a lot of pressure to check your intention at regular intervals to make sure you don't get

carried away with yourself and to ensure you are always using your talent for the sake of Allah."

Linda is both an author and an entrepreneur who publishes and promotes her own books. She reflects on the challenges of promoting her work in a community that she believes is somewhat suspicious of her:

"You have to make your opportunities with the help of Allah. Writing a good book and publishing it seem to be the easiest part of being an author. Gaining the support of the Muslim community and a readership require extensive work and innovative marketing strategies.

"As a new and unknown author in fiction books I would say that men do not have too much of an edge over women. Minorities don't seem to figure into the equation if you are speaking of strictly race. As a Muslim... if you are living in a western country, are a revert Muslim and a female fiction writer then you must overcome some basic distrust or questioning by Muslims living outside the USA. For instance: A frequent question asked is if you pray five times a day. Another is if you wear hijab. I have even been asked if I know what a du'a is! I have not experienced bias or problems in the non-Muslim book world. The progress of me or should I say my book(s) is what is subject to bias in the Muslim community. The negative impact towards people living in the USA (non Muslim and Muslim) since 9/11 and the continuing violence, terrorism and USA foreign policies have an impact on whether an Islamic publisher, distributor, retailer will be interested in me/ books progressing as in getting listed on web sites, placed in brick-and-mortar stores or considered for manuscripts publishing. Potential customers may also have a bias, but many times their curiosity works positively in the progress of book sales. Book sales are the measure of progress for a published author."

With regard to issues facing women and minorities in the field, Sara notes:

"This is an area where I think we are all on an equal footing. Women have no more trouble being published than men but I do think some men wouldn't read a book with a female author because they imagine it to be a women's book. As for writers in Britain whose families come from elsewhere I think in recent years there has been a booming interest in hearing their stories and getting an insight into their experience and there are plenty of workshops and organisations which aim specifically to support these writers. Recently it has been the writings of Jamaican and Pakistani British authors which have captured the public interest and I think in the coming years it will be the turn of Muslims of all backgrounds growing up in the west as long as they are prepared to tell their story in an emotional way and appeal to human hearts."

Naheed is currently focusing on documentary-making. She finds many opportunities in radio and hopes to produce more in-depth pieces as time goes on:

"How easy is it for women/minorities to progress? I'm with the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] so I think they have a particular agenda for advancing visible minorities, being a government branch and all. Women are not a rarity in the newsroom although I suspect they are rare in the upper echelons of decision-making. It's too soon for me to tell but I would suppose it's not much easier to advance than in other places."

• *Academia*

In the academic world, after securing a PhD the opportunities to look for are in teaching positions, preferably tenured, and publishing. Jamilla, an African-American sister who works as an Assistant Professor of Religion in the US notes

that progress is "a struggle, but it's happening."

Khadija reflects on the challenges that lie ahead for her in the academic world:

"The first thing to do after graduation is to land sessional (i.e. temporary) teaching positions at universities; then apply for tenure-track positions teaching Islamic studies. It's a lot of hard work, getting a tenure-track position.

"I don't know how easy it's going to be. I think that if you are really good at what you do, to the extent that your scholarly worth is undeniable, then you can make it. Whether or not I can make it is a different question."

Jennifer also speaks of the challenges facing Muslim women in the "ivory towers":

"There is a prevalent idea that you cannot be a woman in hijab in academia. I have never had to come up for tenure but I am aware that in [urban Canadian university] at least there is a certain eagerness for Muslim woman academics. So I would encourage young women to pursue academic careers. In the States, the dean was very excited when I came to work there, but some of the professors were distinctly unnerved.

"It is not necessarily the case that a Muslim woman in hijab will be rejected or accepted. You shouldn't be afraid of discrimination but you have to be prepared to be strong and fight. Develop your professional credentials and experience and make sure that you are an attractive candidate. If you do encounter discrimination then fight it – contact CAIR for help if necessary."

Heather is honest about the challenges but remains upbeat about the opportunities in the fields in which she is involved:

"In the ESL field it varies widely. There are very few full-time positions for ESL instructors at the college level. Most universities and colleges offer adjunct positions which offer working moms the flexibility to turn down work if

they need more time. The downside is that the income is not very reliable. In political science the situation is similar for instructors who do not yet have their PhDs. For those with a doctorate, there are jobs but the competition is stiff. Moreover, until you are published and have some teaching experience you will not get a tenure-track position.

"It seems to be easy for women to progress in both fields as long as they are active in researching, publishing and professional development."

• *Education*

Hanan suggests that an Islamic school may be a comfortable workplace for a Muslim woman, as many Muslim schools are places in which women form the majority of staff: "[There are] very few men, [it's] very comfortable, we are very relaxed. I think the men feel out of place and strange. We dominate! One of the few fields we can say we dominate!"

However she chose to turn down an opportunity for promotion from teaching assistant to teacher:

"I was offered a teacher position, but I refused because I didn't want to bring my job home with me. It was enough that I am out all day and come home and don't spend as much time with my kids as I should. I thought being a teacher, I would be bringing more things home. I don't have a teaching degree but they offered me the position – in private schools [in Ontario] teachers don't need a degree. It was either a good comment on my work ... or they were desperate!"

Zuhra feels that there may well be discrimination in her field [adult education], and finds that there may be more opportunities when working for the local government:

"What opportunities are there in your field? There are opportunities only if one can fit in and toe the line so to

speak in the college and the team's agenda (going to pubs, eating out in shady establishment etc). However I have opted for working with the Borough [i.e., local municipality] so there are lots of options if one wants it. (If one is found to be a praying person or observing their religious principles they are often bypassed and slighted, with snide remarks made often enough from my personal experience.)"

With regard to how easy it is for women and minorities to progress, she notes that:

"With the right qualifications and possibly connections and demands for the particular subject area, this can either be difficult or easy depending on who is at the top looking down, and how many minority/religious (e.g. Christians get first preference, Africans next) groups. As a Muslim woman who taught at one of the colleges in this Borough, I was seen as less than (for being punctual, doing my work properly and responding positively to students and treating them as persons)."

• *Healthcare*

Both Fatma (a dental hygienist) and Furkan (a dentist) are aware of the opportunities in their field. Fatma is upbeat about the opportunities for dental hygienists in her country:

"Dental Hygiene is progressing. In Western Canada, Hygienists are able to work independently and run their own clinics. Actually, there is an independently run hygiene clinic here in [her Ontario city].

"The laws, however, do not support this and it is a very difficult task indeed to run an independent clinic at this point in time... this will change, hopefully sometime in my future.

"We need the public to be more aware and educated surrounding their dental health and needs. And of course

the options that are available to them."

Furkan points to the options that are open to dentists who, after qualifying, may choose to specialize or go into research. However she laments the fact that in her country, hijab is a very real obstacle to a career and the talents of many women are lost to society as a result.

"How easy is it for women/minorities to progress? This depends on the place you are at on earth. Progress in my country, if wearing hijab, is below zero, it is impossible. To be able to get into a school or an institution or an association, to do further education or training, you have to look mainstream, meaning no hijab. There are so many talented ladies who are left with one option, either to take it off or forfeit the very basic right of a human, that's education. Over here we have so many wasted individuals due to these conditions."

Working in a field which in the west is traditionally female-dominated, Julia did not speak of the opportunities for women *per se*, but she did speak of the value of having North American training and experience, and the respect that her profession brings:

"One thing I really love about it. A person who is North American educated, or anyone who came and had experience here, could market herself anywhere in the world.

"Countries that recruit nurses highly value North American experience and pay well. ... There is transferability, worldwide employment, worldwide respect. In annual studies on the most trusted professionals in Canada, nurses are always in the top three, nurses and firefighters..."

Julia speaks of having many career doors open to her, "both above and horizontally too." As she is qualified as a Registered Nurse (RN) as well as a Nurse Practitioner (NP), she has many options for work: "If for some reason I move to another country where they don't have NP I can work as

RN. There is a shortage of nurses worldwide so the world is my oyster."

A way of moving up from her current position would be to go into teaching, as health institutions are working with universities to train nurses. "But for myself I don't have any further academic aspirations, my career is where I want it to be, but if I wanted to, I could go into that other realm of the profession, teaching. It's there for the taking, it's not unreachable."

Anna also speaks of the many opportunities available for nurses: "Tons of opportunities, really unlimited, you can work anywhere. You can go into research as a nurse, you can move internationally."

Mira speaks of the flexibility of nursing, noting that nurses can work in hospitals or in the community, with different age groups such as the elderly (geriatric) or with pregnant and new mothers, etc. She notes that 90% of nurses are women, although more men are coming into the profession, so it is easy for women to progress.

As for being a member of a visible minority and/or wearing hijab, Mira notes that it depends where you are, but she has been blessed to be in a place where her hijab does not pose any problem:

"It depends where you are working, it depends what hospital, I happened to be in McMaster [Ontario, Canada], which was very progressive, there are doctors from all around the world working there. It's a teaching hospital, so there are always new things happening. It's not so hard, as people are educated about Islam to some degree. Here and there, there are some incidents of prejudice, insecurities, misunderstandings, but it's not like some other hospitals. I worked for a while on a transport team, we would go with a helicopter and pick kids up all over Ontario, all over, up north, Niagara Falls, etc. If I met a sister there who was working with no hijab, she would say, 'Oh my God, I can't

believe it!" She would be so surprised, because it is not so flexible in the 'white bread towns of Ontario'. I am very blessed to be in that hospital.

"Being a minority, at McMaster the attitude is that if you can do the job it doesn't matter, you can be a green frog, they didn't really care. There have been other places where you may have the education and experience and qualifications but because of whatever - visually or because of certain differences, it would be very hard, you don't fit in that little tight hole they have."

A family doctor, Saadia, speaks of the challenges facing women who go into medicine.

"There are many opportunities for advancement, however at a cost. I think women who want to advance their careers end up having to choose between career and family. If women are hard-working and willing to sacrifice time with their families, they can progress."

• *Lawyers and Engineers*

Jasminka describes many opportunities in law, such as more independent work, higher profile cases and ultimately, greater income. She did not regard being Muslim or female as an impediment to progress.

As an electrical engineer who moved from Algeria to Canada, Ouadah was faced with the problem that many immigrant professionals, male and female, encounter, which is that her qualifications and experience were not accepted in the Canadian job market and she had to take a step down in career terms. After a struggle to get into a university for a postgraduate program, Ouadah managed to enroll in a part-time Master's program. She did not have any problems in university, but the workplace was another story altogether.

"Hijab is a problem here in Canada. I had an interview at Motorola, and Canadarm, had an interview there and they were upset, the way he was looking at me... found the hijab to be a problem, to get into my field, a big problem.

"Overcoming problem with hijab – you can't do nothing, you have to choose. Once I went to an agency and he told me... when they hear me on the phone they are very satisfied, happy, say come to the interview, but when they see me they are like [gasps] blocked. I talked to him on the phone, I went there, he [gasps] ... I said, 'Ah, don't tell me no', because I saw his reaction. But to get a good job with hijab [is very difficult] unless there is someone who doesn't care, who cares really about the job."

Howaida feels that there are good opportunities in her field, transport engineering, at the government level as well as with private consulting firms. Whilst gender and colour do not pose significant obstacles in her view, she feels that there is some reluctance among girls to enter fields that are traditionally seen as "boy's subjects":

"I would say that generally gender/colour is not a barrier for progressing. However there still appear to be some hurdles to overcome amongst high school girls to encourage them to enter into science and math-based fields."

• *Computers and Information Technology*

As a computer consultant, Omayya is optimistic about her opportunities:

"Endless opportunities, the limit is the sky [sic]. I could take my career as far as I wish.

"Nothing is easy in life, there is a saying in Arabic that goes, 'Whoever aims at reaching high places, needs to stay up all night.' There are elements to success, if taken into consideration, they will work, regardless of whether you are a woman, from a minority group or not."

Charlette and Sharia both see opportunities for advancement into management in IT, but they sense that in their field it is as much about who you know as what you know.

Charlette says: "It is not easy for women/minorities to progress unless you really have someone in your corner. You can have the best talents. However, corporate America is all about who you know."

And Sharia comments that progress "can be very easy if you network with the right players and do a good job."

Hoda notes that at present, IT is a good field to go into, as "they are trying to attract women into the field," and she has seen people without graduate degrees climbing the career ladder quite quickly: "but it all depends on your ability to do the work." She also saw people with graduate degrees staying at the same level for a long time and not progressing because they lacked motivation. "It all depends on your motivation." As for women entering the IT field, she says:

"Especially for women right now in technology, they are trying to push women into technology, in the IT field. [It is] like proactive, affirmative action, the whole idea of allowing women to advance, equal standing with male counterparts, more women as role models for women who want to enter the IT field, so the more they see women in higher positions, the more it will encourage them to get into the field. So it is possible for [women] to achieve that."

• *Research*

Amena works as a research analyst in the social science field. She notes that working for the government affords good career opportunities: "There are quite a few opportunities to work in both the research and policy side of the federal government. There are many programs devised to help minorities and women in their career development."

In the corporate world, however, Huma is faced with some obstacles in her field (biochemistry). Although she feels that her hard work and intelligence can help her to advance, it is not easy for women and minorities to progress:

"Firstly the male dominated corporate culture is still not accommodating for women, especially mothers. Although people of color are progressing, they have to assimilate into the dominant culture in order to progress. This is uneasy for Muslims or any other minority who wish to continue with their beliefs and practices. Unfortunately business does not respect spirituality very much and activities such as prayer are not regarded as important, this creates an intolerant climate and thus minorities have to struggle to succeed."

- *Office jobs*

Salima and Naz both find that there are opportunities for progress in their careers, although Naz says that she "would like to do my own thing as I am tired of working hard for others and getting little back." Interestingly enough, Salima has already started her own business which she works on in addition to her regular job. Although her company has been pointing her in the direction of moving up into brand management, she is "comfortable in the position I am in now and will most likely choose to stay there."

Salima is comfortable in her work environment, where wearing hijab poses no problem. Naz, unfortunately, is in an environment which could prove to be less supportive: "My determination has always been too great to let me being a [South] Asian woman get in the way. I know for a fact that it would be different if I wore a hijab. My sisters wear hijab and they get treated differently to me all the time."

In the business administration field, Aaminah notes that hijab can be an obstacle to employment:

"When I began wearing hijab regularly, I discovered it is

very hard to find a job. Most companies will freely admit that they are concerned about the image it projects to clients and the 'separation' they feel it puts between me and male co-workers. Since 9-11, employers seem less likely to be forthcoming about the issue, but I can see the shock on their face when I arrive at the interview. I have had problems even with employment agencies in this regard."

Rosie had been promoted shortly before she received my questionnaire. She says: "There are further opportunities for career advancement and I have been told to pursue them by my line manager." She also feels that her workplace is a friendly one for women and minorities: "In the University sector there is substantial tolerance for minorities/women/eccentrics (not meaning to run them all into one category!!) A great place to work for Muslimahs."

Felldelah works for an international petroleum company which may offer opportunities to work overseas. Having a degree will give her a much better chance and she is working on it. She reports that it is very easy for women and minorities, "both Islamic and non-Islamic" to progress in her company.

• *Beauty*

Bailey also finds a lot of opportunity in the beauty field, and notes that:

"There are more minorities involved in nails and the beauty industry at large than is comparable with any other well paid industry out there. You can progress as much as you want, depending on your drive. A lot of driven manicurists open up their own salons or work as beauty consultants with a nail related industry... Plus you have great flexibility. A lot of established nail techs end up leaving their salon, taking their clientele with them and working from home."

Conclusion

There may be problems in the workplace, but they are not necessarily insurmountable. Some may be avoided by choosing a field where these issues are less likely to crop up, or by researching the "culture" of a particular workplace before accepting a job there. Each woman must face her own obstacles and overcome them, but she may take comfort from the fact that she is not alone, and may learn tips and tricks from those who have faced these problems before.

PART FIVE

The Home Front

Once you have worked through the issues of what you want to do and why you want to do it, it's time to start laying the foundations for things to run smoothly at home.

Getting the family on board

Every working woman needs a support network, which starts at home. You will have to get your family on your side. If you are still young and living at home with your parents, seek their support and show them they can trust you (yes, parents do worry about their daughters). If you're not married, make this one of your questions to ask a potential husband; find out what he thinks of women working and how he would feel about sharing chores. Look for a partnership where you will be supportive towards one another. Women who are married need to involve their husbands in decisions concerning work and seek their support too.

Family – cheering squad or obstacle course?

The women contacted for this survey are in a range of family situations. Some are single and may have to deal with parents' or family's responses to their work aspirations. Others are married and it is the husband who is the main figure whose support or lack of it may be the determining factor in whether a woman works or not. Family members and in-laws may also weigh in with opinions on a woman's

chosen field of work, as happened to Bailey, a convert whose uncle had owned his own hair salon for many years and was initially very outspoken in his opposition to her work as a nail technician, but eventually accepted it as a good idea that "beats McDonalds or Target any day", especially while she is still a student. Bailey also reports that her husband "really encourages me to better my life."

Felldelah didn't have much choice – at the time when she finished school most people went straight out to work, and further study was not an option. "I live with my gran, so she needed the support."

Zuhra had an upbringing that seemed to assume that she would not work: "My father had this idea that my husband will provide for me therefore he took me out of secondary school at age 14, I then had to learn the usual things cooking sewing etc."

But she adds: "It was my husband who pushed me and encouraged with lots of help and support so that I can be where I am today."

Other sisters also reflected on support from one's husband. Hoda stresses the importance of being realistic and involving your husband in the decision: "If a woman is going to work outside the home, she cannot make the decision on her own. It will require effort from the husband, he cannot continue living life the same. If she tries to say, 'Let me work outside the home and it won't affect anything at all', she is kidding herself. She needs to work with him, for support."

Fatma actively seeks her husband's involvement in her ventures, and expresses her appreciation for his support:

"First and foremost, I involve my husband in every aspect of every decision that I make. I warn him beforehand of the trials and difficulties that may arise as a result of my time being constrained. This way, he knows that he is my priority and that he is respected. My husband is a wonderful man, and he always picks up where I leave off. He knows

I do whatever I can to make the house run smoothly, but sometimes, I can't do it all and it is because of him that I still have my sanity. May Allah bless him with Jannah."

Perhaps unusually, Omayya's husband works in the same field as she does, and she finds that this is a great help: "having a husband who is a true partner and friend is another asset, and what helped him understand my position and duties, is the fact that he works in the same field, and he knows firsthand what it is like."

Salima also reflects on family support, including that of her husband:

"My family has always been among my biggest supporters. But when it came to furthering my education and pursuing my career goals, my husband was always cheering me on, and always cheered me up when times were tough. I started and finished secondary school after getting married. A lot of people assume that it's hard to pursue education while married and then postpone marriage. But the reality is that it is so much easier – especially with support like I had."

A pledge to a terminally-ill grandmother was the impetus behind Heather's success in college and beyond. Not wanting to see her granddaughter make the same mistake as her daughter had made – that of passing up the chance to get a college degree – Heather's Nana made her promise, shortly before she died, that she would go to college and make her proud. This promise helped Heather to keep going whenever she felt like giving up.

A grandmother also inspired Charlette: "She had no formal education, however she wanted and made many sacrifices to ensure only the best for her children and grandchildren."

Huma was supported by both parents; her father was "very qualified but also maintained a very humble and warm lifestyle." Her mother also supported higher education for girls, as she herself had benefited from a higher education at a time when it was uncommon.

Shariah also had support from her parents, who always reminded her "that I am bright and have the potential to shine." She also had support from "older relatives [who] inspired me to go to college."

Swimming upstream

However, some sisters have had to fight opposition from husbands and family, who may have different notions about a woman's place, based on culture, traditions or interpretations of Islam.

One of the sisters in this situation mused about the problem and the reasons for it. She works so that she can afford a better education for her children, but her husband would prefer to see her taking care of the house full time:

"My husband is totally against me working. I have been doing it for 8 yrs. He thinks it is disruptive to our family life. I come home tired and stressed and he wants to come home from work and find everything perfect and everyone smiling and happy. Over the years I have been really fighting with him, either my kids go to a better school or I stop working and take care of anything.

"He'd rather they go to public school and our home would be a much happier environment, he thinks. He thinks I am stressed out and upset all the time but actually I think... he's the one who comes home, tired and stressed, and expects me to cheer him up. He hasn't forbidden me to work but is making it difficult, constant source of argument, makes me feel that nothing is accomplished around the house because I'm working, these kinds of things. Not helping or supporting me along the way even though I am telling him why I am doing it. [I am] sticking to my guns but this year I may have a change of heart, just can't give in. I know it's a case of obeying your husband or raising your children, maybe obeying your husband is the more important thing?

"... I can't understand it really; I think it's more of a cultural thing. I thought a lot of husbands would be happy, someone is helping out... I could easily tell him it's your problem and put the burden on him, but I'm taking it into my own hands and he doesn't appreciate that. He would like them to be in a better school but he thinks that if I stay home our home environment will be happier and they'll be fine with that, that will be enough for them, but if there is stress and bickering at home that's going to affect them."

Furkan also encountered family pressure when her family saw her getting tired because of the high-pressure nature of her field:

"Working for me started when I was in school, because we go into practice [in dentistry] that time, due to the very hectic schedule of my school, family members were not happy to see me getting tired so much and always stated that they preferred me studying something easier, like pharmacy. ... When it comes to my goals, I am very stubborn and hard headed. So, I kept studying and getting high grades."

Julia remembers her father opposing her decision to go into nursing because of concerns for her wellbeing:

"I started nursing in '85 when they discovered AIDS and that it was spread by body fluids. So when I started nursing school, we treated every patient like they had AIDS so you had to wear gloves when touching anything to do with body fluids. So if you were giving a bath, or helping someone to brush their teeth, or doing a dressing where there's blood, you put on gloves..."

"Because he had that fear, that I would get AIDS and die, he discouraged me. But on the day I graduated nursing school he cried and took a photo with me and was so proud of me."

Julia also had to put herself through school because her father refused to pay for it. She worked at weekends to pay

her fees. Her motivation to keep going was the thought that "I worked too hard to give it up."

A now-divorced sister whose husband objected to her studying for a degree was faced with opposition from her father too; he sided with her husband, saying "you got married to have children, not to go to school." But when she graduated, her father came to the awards ceremony at the university, congratulated her and asked her why she didn't go on to do further studies. This sister wryly notes that it is "a cultural male thing... don't expect to understand it!"

The Community

Huma notes that the attitude of the local Muslim community can also be an obstacle. In her particular community children attended classes in the local mosque where she was presented with a very traditional and cultural view of women in Islam:

"Being study oriented, I studied about Islam as a reaction to the negativity being taught in the Masjid about what a woman can and cannot do. This allowed me to liberate myself by studying Allah's words and realizing that women were encouraged to reach their potential in Islam and the Masjid was not influencing us correctly. Also during university, I was exposed to US civil rights activists and was very influenced by their struggle for equality, e.g. Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Mumia Abu-Jamal... This led to the realization that I was able to contribute something and that I deserved the respect of my accomplishments. It also revealed the oppressive nature of capitalism and inherited post-colonial prejudice in my own community. I am still growing and intend to pursue more fulfilling career options!"

Whose money is it?

The money that a woman earns from her work is hers, not her husband's. Many women work to help support their families as noted previously, and this is regarded as an act of charity on their part. In a well known hadeeth²⁶ it is narrated that Zaynab, the wife of Ibn Mas'ood, wanted to give some jewellery in charity after hearing the Prophet's exhortation to women at Eid prayers, but her husband claimed that he and his child had more right to be given it. She asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about that and he agreed with Ibn Mas'ood. Giving to family members is both charity and upholding of family ties. But the wife is not under any obligation to hand over her money to her husband and the husband has no right to demand it. Having said that, we should remember that marriage is supposed to be a partnership, not a battlefield, and husbands and wives should cooperate in order to provide a decent standard of living for the entire family.

Some working wives have suggested that a couple should have two joint accounts set up, one that is primarily the husband's and another that is primarily the wife's, as a means of keeping their money separate. This is one of several options for running family finances, and each couple has to work out the way that best suits their situation.

Childcare

The usual question asked when a mother decides to go to work is "what about the children?"

This starts with choosing the right job for you and your situation. Many women choose a part-time position, or look for a field where part-time work, "mommy's hours" or telecommuting are options, or they look for some kind

of work to do at home, where they can pick up their work and put it down easily when needed by the family, then go back and carry on.

Mira suggests adjusting the work schedule to the family if possible: "So if kids are in school, work when they are in school, or do shift work, or whatever else - workshare, work part-time."

Jennifer was able to take some of her work home with her, so that part of her job was done at the office, or elsewhere when she was liaising with community agencies on behalf of her employer, and part was done at home where she was able to be close to her children whilst working.

Full-time positions may also be a successful choice, depending on one's circumstances. Hoda accepted a full-time position (post-doctoral research on campus) for a while, although she had small children, as it was more practical than a job with a lengthy commute to a research park on the edge of the city: "at the time we were living close to campus, as my husband was still a PhD student. It was better than commuting to IBM, as the university was close to home."

Whether full-time or part-time, women have to factor in the demands of family and children as well. Sharia says that she tries "to work around my family's demands and schedule." Three of the respondents spoke of how hard it can be, even with part-time hours, but they give credit to supportive husbands and understanding children, which reinforces the importance of getting family support and communicating one's needs to family members.

Fatma has worked out a routine for dropping off and collecting her children from the babysitter when she goes out to her part-time job:

"With dental hygiene I am able to work part time and so I only work two days a week. I leave my children with a sitter for a couple of hours and my husband picks them up from

the sitter. My husband is very supportive of all that I do and honestly, I could not do what I do without his support."

Saadia describes having made certain career choices that will accommodate a family's needs, as well as choosing to work part-time:

"Alhamdulillah, I have a very supportive husband. My kids are older now, and they understand that Mummy is not always around, but when I am at home, I try to make the most of it. This is the main reason I chose Family Medicine as opposed to another more demanding specialty. Also, this is the reason I work part time."

Howaida has worked out a schedule with her husband so that childcare is taken care of whilst she is at work:

"It is tough. However I do work part-time and my husband is extremely supportive and stays home with our daughter on the days that I'm at work (2 days a week). He is working on a PhD and is consulting so his work schedule is flexible."

Childcare issues are the reason why some sisters choose to work at home, as we have seen above. Other women stay home when the children are very small, and only go to work when the children start school full-time. Some, like Howaida, share the childcare with their husbands, as we have seen above. Others, such as Anna and Huma, are blessed with in-laws who delight in looking after their grandchildren and are willing to help out. And some are still looking for the ideal childcare solution and doing their best to keep going in the meantime, such as Ouardah, who studies when her daughter is asleep and worries about finding a childcare provider who would look after her child as well as she would.

Drawing boundaries or blurring the lines

Those who work outside the home are often able to leave their work behind in the workplace when they come home. Sisters who work from home, on the other hand, describe the challenges of juggling work and home in the same place. The advantage is that you are close at hand and accessible to your children and other family members. The downside, of course, is that you are close at hand and accessible to your children and other family members! Two sides of the same coin.

Munira notes that "having the workshop in the house has been fantastic." On the other hand, Naheed notes that "it can be quite frustrating to meet deadlines when the kids are being uncooperative or you have a house that needs to be cleaned up. I find that I end up doing a lot of things after the kids are in bed or before they wake up."

Lori also uses "down time" to work, when her husband is at work, the children are in school or the baby is asleep. Sara burns the midnight oil, tending to her "compulsion to write even if I did it at midnight when all the children were in bed."

My own favourite time to write is after Fajr, when everyone else usually goes back to sleep. The house is quiet, the phone is less likely to ring, and I can earn a sense of achievement by getting some work done before the pandemonium of the school run begins.

Patricia speaks of the benefits of being available for her family by working at home, as well as the benefits that it has brought to her marriage:

"Well writing's perfect for that [being available for the family]. I tend to drop it immediately if my kids need anything. I can attend to any of their needs, go shopping with them, eat with them, keep an eye on what they're doing and what they're watching on TV, and so on. I take

that responsibility very seriously. I'm always there for them. Work has always come second to my kids. Again, when my husband walks through the door, I drop it abruptly unless I have a deadline, in which case he is remarkably understanding and patient. Also, he's very busy and we don't have much time together, so I'm happy to stop work in order to be with him. Incidentally, I think having a profession of my own has added a depth to our marriage that perhaps wasn't there before. Many women begin to feel a certain dissatisfaction with life once the kids are grown. In some ways, I feel I'm just beginning!"

After working at the dental office, Fatma finds a way of combining fun trips with her children and working on her hijab pins:

"As for my pin business, I take my kids to indoor playgrounds or let them play in the park and take my craft along with me, when they don't make so many demands on me. Also, I involve my children in every aspect of the business that I can. If there is a task that they can do, I leave it for them."

Importance of scheduling time with husband and kids

Whilst all family members are rushing off to work and school, and perhaps other commitments too, such as volunteering in the community or playing sports, it is important to schedule family time, to keep the ties strong among family members. This is a priority for Doris:

"For me, I do what I can, when I can and how I can. I try to arrange my schedule so that I can be available to my daughter as much as possible. I go on field trips with school when I can. I am with her for lunch when I can."

Pamela also speaks of the importance of being there for her children when they come home from school. As she works

for a Muslim organization, she finds that her employers are very understanding:

"Another thing I like is the flexibility that [my employer] affords – because it is a Muslim organization, they appreciate that I need to be home with my kids when they get home from school."

Spending time with one's husband also matters. When both parents are working, it can feel as if you need to schedule an appointment with one's own spouse simply to ask him what he would like for dinner! Huma is one of those who spoke of the struggle to find time to spend with her husband, but noted that "We do make it a point to spend at least one night every other week where we go out."

Last but not least, we should remember that women need time to themselves as well, to recharge their own batteries. We are often so busy looking after the needs of other family members and work schedules that taking care of ourselves is last on the list. This is unwise, because the last thing any women needs is burn-out. We need to schedule time to look after ourselves, body, mind and soul.

Mira pointed this out: "It's important to take time for yourself, an hour or half an hour, have a bath, read half a page [of Qur'an], prayer, extra breath, reenergize, recharge batteries."

Keeping the domestic wheels turning

Someone needs to ensure that the home runs fairly smoothly, laundry is done, meals are prepared and the home is kept neat and clean enough to allow the family to function normally. There are *ahaadeeth* which describe the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) helping out with chores in the house and Muslim scholars ancient and modern have discussed whether women are

morally obliged to do the housework. Two sisters in my survey, Doris and Khadija, wondered why questions about combining work and duties in the home are not asked of men who work and have families. But regardless of such debate, and whether we like it or not, it remains a fact of life that women are usually primarily responsible for the family and the running of the household. That can be a full time job in itself, but as stated previously in this book, there are women who have to work for financial reasons, and there are women who have to work because of what may be called a vocation: they feel the need for more, to contribute to the community, to express themselves creatively, to achieve. This means taking measures to meet the demands of home, family and work.

For a few high-energy, "born organized" individuals, this is hardly an issue. They take the pressures of work and the demands of family and home in their stride. If you ask such folks how they do it, they may not understand the question, and they find it hard to explain because it comes as naturally as breathing to them. For the rest of us, we have to master ...

... The gentle art of juggling

The working women I contacted spoke of the importance of getting things under control as it makes life so much easier for them and their families. In addition to getting approval and moral support from family members, they also recommend getting them involved on a practical level. Omayya speaks of the skills that are needed to keep the home and family running smoothly; she also speaks of getting her husband and children involved:

"Time management, prioritization, are skills that I had to keep up with. I find myself always looking for new ideas, on how to maximize the use of time. Organization is a key,

and asking my husband and daughters to co-operate, and coaching them on what to do, and how it could be done are key skills that contribute to our ability to manage."

Several women expressed their appreciation for their husband's help around the house, with childcare and with cooking meals or bringing in food. Some noted that this is nothing other than Sunnah, pointing to the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), as Mira says:

"The Prophet helped in his household and he is most perfect example of man. So the husband cannot really say that 'this is not my thing'. Are you better than the Prophet? You can never say that. So he has to help in the house to some degree.

Doris feels particularly blessed in having a husband who follows this particular Sunnah:

"I have really been blessed by Allah because he has given me a husband who understands that if both husband and wife are working, both husband and wife participate in the family obligations. Not to compare him with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but I believe my husband knows that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) participated in household chores (at least that is what I have read). Having said that, I realize that, as I have said, I am really blessed and not everyone has this situation."

Khadija also reflected on Islamic views on women's work, with a lament for a past when women were truly scholars:

"While Aisha is reported to have given fatwas for male Sahaba and Tabi'un, how often do we hear serious calls for sisters to pursue their studies up to levels that they can serve as religious authorities for the entire community, for men as well as women? It is stated (in al-Dhahabi's *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*) that Aisha was highly knowledgeable in medicine and Arab history as well.

"I see no Islamic reason why housework and childcare should not be shared equally by husband and wife, and why children cannot help out as well. Such an arrangement ought to result in more family harmony and cooperativeness.

"And who is it who has decided that the most important thing a mother can give her children is a luxurious array of culinary choices and a sparkling clean house, and on what textual basis? Sometimes my kids ask me profound questions about Islam, religion and life in general, and thanks to my studies I am able to answer them. If I can help them seriously engage life's questions, I think that is much more important than whether last night we had chili (again!) for supper instead of something fancy."

When getting down to the nitty-gritty of cleaning, cooking and other domestic necessities, women described various ways in which they tackle the challenge.

Paid help

When asked how she copes, one sister responded: "I contract it all out!" Some sisters living in the Middle East have maids, as it is common for people to have domestic help in that part of the world, and it is easy to find. Patricia notes that with the money she can earn from her work, it makes economic sense to hire help:

"Umm, I'm embarrassed to say this, but I have a housemaid. It just doesn't make sense for me to spend my day cleaning bathrooms when I can make \$60 an hour (much more for book writing, and I'm working on my fourth book at the moment). Also, sometimes we have a lot of social functions. I can't be catering to all of these if I have a deadline looming."

Lori also avails herself of paid help:

"I am also fortunate to live in a region where domestic help is available at a reasonable fee. I presently have a cleaning

lady who comes twice a week to do the 'big' cleaning, while my girls and I maintain and keep up the rest of the week." Some of the sisters living in the West also pay for help with chores. Jennifer has a cleaning lady and reports that she is "considering using a laundry service, at least for my husband's work clothes."

Jazminka's husband is another one who helps with housework, and has agreed to pay for a cleaner every two weeks.

Huma complains that "at home the demands are never ending! I have had to get outside help with cooking food, and cleaning to keep up with it" which includes a cleaning lady twice a month. She also says: "My husband helps a lot – thought a bit more initiative would be nice!"

Omayya started out by trying to do it all, but found that this could not last forever:

"At the beginning, I tried to be a super woman, by doing the house cleaning and cooking myself. Of course that added so much stress to my life, and took away the few hours that I have a week to spend with my kids. After so many years of doing that, I realized that there must be a better way. So I started by hiring housekeeping help, once a week. And with time, I increased that to once a day. That really was a huge help to me. It relieved me from worrying about those essential duties, and gave me more time to spend with my kids. Of course there is a cost to everything, and since I am the one who is responsible for the financials in our household, I had to include the housekeeping cost in the budget. It was tough to maintain in the beginning, but with time, it became just like any other expense that we have."

Family help

Of course, not everyone can afford maids and cleaners, and those who have a cleaner coming in once a week or less often

still need to keep things under control in the meantime. Most small children (and some older ones too) can make a house look messy in a matter of minutes, if not seconds! So most of the sisters with families spoke of recruiting husbands and children to help around the house day to day. We have seen above how some husbands are helping out, but encouraging children to help out too teaches them important life skills as well as sharing the burden of caring for the house.

Mira spoke of training children to help out from an early age, teaching them to make their own beds, (which is easy with fitted sheets and duvets) and put their dirty clothes in the laundry basket, and letting them help with washing up as they grow older. Erica also had a plan to teach her children to cook, letting one child prepare a meal each day. Mothers-in-law also received praise for their help. Anna says:

"I am blessed because my mother-in-law helps out. Sometimes I call her the night before and she still comes to babysit too. She also cooks when she is here, and when I come home, she brings food on a tray and tells me, 'Don't move, you're tired...'"

Salima also speaks of her mother-in-law in glowing terms: "Alhamdulillah, we live in an extended family system at home. My mother-in-law should win an award for her support!"

Mechanical means should not be overlooked either. In countries where domestic help is less common, machines can be of a great help. Dishwashers, slow-cookers and microwaves can all make cooking and cleanup easier. At the time of the survey, at least one sister was celebrating the recent acquisition of a dishwasher which made light of a daily chore.

Scheduling tasks

When time is tight, time management is an invaluable skill. As mentioned above, Omayya makes a point of working on this skill on an ongoing basis: "Time management, prioritization, are skills that I had to keep up with. I find myself always looking for new ideas, on how to maximize the use of time. Organization is a key."

When Hoda was working full-time, everything was done on a schedule: "Thursday 5-8 was cleaning, Saturday was groceries, Sunday cook a couple of meals for the week. Kids went to bed early... we didn't have much of a social life either."

Naheed also schedules household tasks on certain days, and sets aside time each day for daily chores: "For housework, I've set aside days that specific things get done, i.e. vacuuming on Mondays, dusting on Tuesdays, laundry every day, etc. The first hour of my day after my older two leave for school is devoted to tidying and putting things away, breakfast dishes, etc."

Fatma devotes one day a week for cleaning and sticks to it: "I have a cleaning day, and no matter what...the house gets cleaned on that day. It is usually after Fajr on Sunday morning. So the house is usually cleaned up by about noon."

Jennifer has also had to set limits on her time, which extends to phone calls as well as other areas of life:

"I have had to make my life very structured. It has to run like clockwork. I have certain times for phone calls which my friends and family know about; at other times, when I am working at home, I simply do not answer the phone, and I let the voice mail pick it up."

One thing that is an immense help in making housework go more smoothly is having less stuff to pick up and move and clean. All the "organization gurus" who write books and

host websites tackling this problem, such as Marla Cilley (the "Flylady"), Don Aslett and Julia Morgenstern, say that you must start with decluttering. The more stuff you have, the more cleaning and organizing you have to do.

Mira, the nurse/midwife, also points to this issue: "Simplify things. I find that many people – including myself – they have too many little things around the house to dust and look after, you don't need all these things to make you busy."

You simply do not need to hold on to all your college papers, kids' baby clothes (unless you are hoping or planning to have another), 10 year old bank statements etc. Get rid of whatever you do not need or use – give it to a friend, donate it or sell it if it is usable, otherwise recycle it if possible (shred any personal or financial papers first), and as a last resort throw it in the trash.

Attitude adjustment

Sometime we are our own worst critics, and we need to learn to stop being so hard on ourselves. Hanan, a teaching assistant in an Islamic school, says that she wishes she "had Martha Stewart's tips and secrets all tucked away somewhere" and warned against opening any cupboards in her neat and tidy house ("Avalanche!") but the fact remains that the majority of working women are unlikely to have houses that look like something from a magazine.

Munira speaks of a transition during the period when she was establishing her leatherworking business:

"I used to be fanatical about having the house impeccable but not any longer. [It's] too much and I just don't have the energy. My daughter helps me out on this one and also with the cooking. About 2 yrs ago I decided that I had to choose: an impeccable house and a 5 star restaurant and no income

or some sort of income and much more excitement and challenges."

Heather, an academic who has lived in both the US and Egypt, had adopted a more relaxed attitude:

"Basically, I put housekeeping near the bottom of my to-do list. I am blessed to have a VERY laid back husband who would forget to eat if I didn't remind him and has such a huge wardrobe that I don't have to do laundry very often! While living in Egypt we were also fortunate to be able to hire a live in nanny/maid. So when I was not working my 'gruelling' 4 hour work-day I was able to spend quality time with my daughter and husband. In the USA I live with my parents who share the cooking, child care and cleaning with me.

"Don't get me wrong, it's not that I never cook or clean. I just don't put it as the highest priority in my life."

It is sad that in some quarters, Muslim women compete in housework and cooking, and judge one another (often harshly) solely on the basis of their décor, dusting skills and fancy cuisine. Keeping a clean home and cooking nutritious meals are important, but so is the work that many women are doing beyond the domestic sphere. We need to find a balance between the two.

Feeding the troops

Families, like armies, march on their stomachs, and putting food on the table is a daily challenge for many working mothers. Some of us are faced with wildly differing tastes of family members, but unless cooking is your beloved hobby and helps you to wind down, you will be looking for ways to come up with enjoyable yet nutritious meals for everyone without spending hours on elaborate meals that disappear in five minutes.

Naheed, a radio journalist, is faced with juggling her husband's and children's tastes:

"My big challenge is dinner. My husband prefers traditional Pakistani food and the kids prefer 'Western' although there is some overlap. I try to make things that can go together so that I don't have to cook too much. And certainly one or two days a week we're eating leftovers."

Mira offers practical advice, including a spousal attitude adjustment:

"Plan ahead, what are you going to eat next week? Plan meals, cook ahead, cook in quantity so you can put some in the freezer, or cook for two days at least. Purchase precooked meals, they have halal ones now. Some husbands want fresh cooked every day from scratch – adjust your husband, talk to them."

Sharia's favoured method is "cooking several big meals on the weekends" her days off from her job as a business analyst – "and preparing enough to last a few days; and preparing quick meals during the week."

Keep It Simple, Sister!

There are plenty of quick and simple meals that will feed a family – eggs, pasta and ground meat or chicken are all ingredients that lend themselves to quick dinners. Every culture has dishes that are quick and easy to prepare, so whatever your family's preference, you can find something.

Examples:

- macaroni and cheese
- lentil dishes (*dal* to the Desis, '*ads* to Arabs) – red lentils in particular cook very quickly
- omelettes or '*ijjah* (simple egg dishes)

- pasta dishes with sauce, from spaghetti bolognaise to all the regional and cultural variations on the theme

There are also readymade freezer meals, pies etc that can form the basis of a quick meal; some of those in ordinary supermarkets may prove to be halal (fish or vegetarian options) and some Muslim companies are now producing halal versions of standbys such as chicken pot pies, sausages and burgers, etc. With concerns about additives and levels of fat and sodium in many processed and prepared foods, caution may be advisable and such meals should not, perhaps, be everyday fare, but they can be a great help occasionally. In some regions, vegetarian and Kosher ready meals (both of which are halal for Muslims if they contain no alcohol) may also be easily available. For days when one wants shortcuts to home cooking, packages of washed and cut vegetables, as well as lettuce and salad, are also available, as are bags of grated cheese, jars of minced garlic and ginger, and other time-savers.

When it comes to the beloved traditional dishes that require elaborate preparation, some extra planning may be required. You could set aside a few hours to make a double batch or more and freeze some for a future meal. Or invite friends over and have everyone over the age of say, ten, sit around the table chatting and rolling vine leaves or stuffing samosas. Some halal butchers also sell meat ready ground with spices for dishes such as kibbeh and kebabs, which you can buy, form into the desired shape, and freeze.

Picky eaters and other annoyances

The solution to individual favourites and picky eaters in my own household is quite simple. As I have neither the time nor the inclination to act as a "short order cook" and

give everyone the dinner he or she wants each day, I cook one meal for dinner. Each family member will get at least one favourite meal per week. If any person really cannot stand what is on offer, there are two standbys: yoghurt and honey, served in a bowl, or that old North American classic, the peanut butter and jam sandwich. On very organized days there will be salad or chopped veggies waiting on the table so that hungry children will at least have something healthy to munch on: this is designed to divert them from junk until dinner is ready.

The Freezer Is Our Friend

Some sisters make effective use of the freezer, cooking large batches of food and then freezing and labelling portions. Fatma is a particularly enthusiastic freezer cook and describes her methods in detail:

"I do a lot of preparation. When I cook, I make food for 12 people instead of four. I freeze two portions and we eat the one portion. This allows me flexibility on the days that I don't have time to make a meal. Or if I'm at work and dinner is not ready, my husband can take something out of the freezer and put it in the oven. I just look in the freezer and see what I've got. Gourmet meals in minutes!

"I label everything. My freezer is full of bags and containers with labels. I freeze everything. Prepared cut fruit and vegetables, prepared pies, prepared curries, everything! My family can't tell the difference.

"Another trick is to season the meat before you put it in the freezer. I decide what I'm gonna do with it before I put it in the freezer. I marinate it in the seasonings and sauce and Voila! Dinner is served!"

Then there is always takeout. Even in regular fast-food outlets, you can usually find a fish or vegetarian option, but in many western cities the halal takeout business is

booming. In the Greater Toronto Area, for example, the Popeye's fried chicken franchise is owned by Muslims and all their food is halal. There is also an abundance of halal "ethnic" restaurants, and more recently we have begun to see takeout venues offering healthy options for those who want to be careful about their diet. Anna and others spoke of bringing in takeout food on a fairly regular basis. Sisters living in Muslim countries where all the meat is halal have an even greater choice, as Lori describes:

"As for cooking, well....I admit, I do depend sometimes on fast food, but the fast food here consists of such things as chicken shwarma, falafel sandwiches, ready-cooked chickens and, if I really want to splurge, there are restaurants that have ready-made meals such as mansaf, rolled grape leaves and freekah.²⁷ McDonald's/Burger King are totally last resorts—once in a blue moon!"

Learning more

There are many resources out there with information on ideas and products that can help with the challenge of juggling family, home and work. Sharing ideas with others sisters can be a great help. I often come home from a get together with sisters with a new recipe to try or an idea for organizing things. Women's magazines have always offered tips and tricks for the domestic sphere. Now there are books and web sites devoted to these issues too, complete with lists of chores and step-by-step guides for the domestically-challenged and the super-busy. You will find more information in Appendix B.

The Last Word

When invited to add any comments or advice to other sisters, several sisters responded with views that reflect the wide range of opinions that abound on the subject of Working Muslimahs. Each sister's comments reflect her own experiences, inclinations and situation and cannot be taken as a one-size-fits all prescription for all women, but we can learn from one another and benefit from hearing other points of view.

- ➡ Although I did work outside the home as a Muslimah for some years, another important reason I feel it was better for me to work in my home was for some of those same "tricky issues." I also believe that it is not a Muslim woman's place to go after a career with whatever it takes. I do believe women are an integral key in a Muslim society, but unfortunately, I feel far too many women's libbers are influencing Muslim women and downplaying their vital role as mothers, caregivers and wives. Trying to "bring home the bacon (a euphemism for money), and fry it up in the pan" takes a lot of energy from a mother/wife. If those energies could be directed solely to the family life and religious education, I feel we as Muslim women would be much better served, and subsequently have a more positive effect on the society as a whole. The value of mothers is far too underrated. It is the most challenging of careers and the result of a job well done is a future generation well-nurtured, well-rounded, well-educated and psychologically sound. Whatever career path a Muslim woman chooses, it should always be with the insight that her career as a mom should be at the forefront and her

career outside the home secondary or even disposable should the demands of motherhood and family require her attentions. I've been on both sides of the coin and can see the differences so clearly now...I love my job, but even working out of the home takes away from my being the complete mom I long to be. I feel I never have enough time to really take care of myself because all my time is divided between work, children and the husband, as well as outside social activities, such as my Islamic class, visiting, and family responsibilities. I feel that my job takes up that time that I could allot to myself doing such things as regularly exercising, fixing myself up, spending more time studying and reading the Qur'an, praying extras, etc. Every case is of course individual and every situation has its demands, but in general, I do believe that the Muslim woman's most valuable career is that of being a mother.

Lori, Freelance Consultant/Editor

- ➡ The hardest job I have ever had to do is to stay at home with my young child full-time, especially when he reached the "terrible twos" stage. I used to think that stay-at-home moms were oppressed. Now I admire them! That was the hardest thing I have ever done and I admire those who do that. For myself, I feel that the time I spend apart from my child has improved my relationship with him and made me a better parent. I spent a great deal of time researching the daycare and checking on the environment, and I am comfortable leaving him there. This is my response to those who say that women who spend time away from their families are doing something haram. It is not part of our modern concept but it is interesting to note that in childhood the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spent two years in the care of a foster mother, away from

his own family. The matter is far more grey than the black-and-white concepts that are so often presented.

Jennifer, Academic/Community Development Worker

- ➡ Stuff happens in life. Daughters are going to grow up, get married, have children... be prepared. People die, people get divorced. Imagine the worst case scenario, then work backwards from there. More knowledge = less stress.

Julia, Nurse Practitioner

- ➡ Consider how work affects the family, what are the responsibilities of husband and wife.

We should think of how we as women and sisters can help each other. We need mentoring between each other, advice, support; NOT backbiting and cheating and being nasty and jealous and envious. We should really be supporting and nurturing and loving and give advice. That is so important, but it is lacking. We need mentors, apprenticeship, internship. [A female Muslim doctor in my community] has an office, has interns working for her, she supports people in that way. She is organizing now for Muslim doctors from overseas, have a welcoming, show them around hospital. ... You should be a helpful person but especially if there are Muslims struggling, offer them that hand because you have been there before, you know what it is like, you have gone through it, give them some advice.

Many times sisters say "I am never going to get a job because I have hijab, they're prejudiced, they're racist, they hate us." I say, "Sister, it's not because you wear hijab, it's because you don't speak English properly. Take some English classes, you have to be able to communicate if you want to work here [in North America]." I don't think it's the scarf, it may be but it's

more to do with the fact that this is a very materialistic society, if you can do the job they will take you. So it's not "poor us, just because we are wearing hijab nobody wants us, everybody hates us"; it's not that, sometimes you don't have the skills, expertise, experience, knowledge. Work on that: if you develop that, then maybe the other stuff will come along with it. That works both ways. Sometimes someone will say "Is there anybody who is a Muslim that I can employ?" because they know that they will be on time, trustworthy, nothing will be stolen in the store. So make sure when you are working that you are leaving right impression on people, you are pleasant, you are responsible, you are on time. You cannot show up half an hour late and say they hate me, they fired me because I am a Muslim; they fired you because you were continually half an hour late or more, so be honest with yourself and you'll find our horizons will expand more than they have been so far. There will always be some problems and resistance but they can be worked with if we keep ourselves in check.

Mira, Nurse/Midwife

- ➡ I strongly believe that young Muslim girls need to get an education and get some work experience. It doesn't have to be all through their life and marriage. It is important for several reasons:

We need to be out there, especially sisters in hijab, representing Islam. We want people to know that we have brains, we can function, we are not oppressed, we are not slaves to our men, our men don't keep us as slaves, they respect us as humans.

We have to teach people who we are and what we're about. We're not foreigners who don't speak English!

It is good for our own personal growth too. One sister who is educated but never worked in her field came to

Canada and had to work – it was too difficult for her. We have to learn about people, how to interact, become socially educated.

Anna, Nurse

- ➡ Be a Muslim and you won't find any problem. Women may say, "I take off my scarf, I don't wear hijab, because of the job, I can't find a job." Who is the Razzaq [Provider]? God, He is the One Who feeds you. Give Him what He wants and He will give you. He's the One. If He wants to give you, He will give you.

When [the children] go to school it is good to work part time, then when they come back you have to be at home. They need that, they need you to talk to them... as far as you afford it, take and you are assured that you are going to give them Islamic morals, then go to work, if you can't it is better not to go to work, or not to make them at all, you are not obliged to.

PART TIME job for women with kids, when they are at school go to work 4-5 hours. And work near to where you live, or you lose 2 hours in transportation. But when they are at home, you have to be there, or they will start to apply the bad things they learn at school, have TV, may go to places you don't want them to go to. Even when moms are with them, if they close their eyes for five minutes... especially in this time. You have to be very careful. This is how I think.

Ouardah, Electrical Engineer

- ➡ I think she needs to look at the reason why she wants to work? Is it necessary? Ask husband's opinion, if he doesn't want her to work, does she really need to work? It's not easy when you have someone against you all the way. Needs to look at it carefully, weigh out the pros and cons, whether it's worth it. Because, yes, it will

affect your family in a way, even though you may not see it, but it will affect then when you're always busy and tired.

But we need lots of women out there working, especially Muslim women. In all fields that are Islamically acceptable – doctors... we need doctors. I would like to see a lot of Muslim women in different fields, makes a difference to society and gives us a place to go when we need something. All the power to them, my situation is different but all the power to those who can go out and make a difference.

Hanan, Teaching Assistant

- ➡ I believe that God has given all of us talents and abilities, and will hold us responsible for what we have done with them. Islam, as the religion of the fitra, is in tune with human nature, and does not ask us to suppress and waste our abilities. Rather, I believe we are called upon to use them to grow to become whatever we are meant to be.

Khadija, Graduate Student/Teaching Assistant

- ➡ It can be very hard, but I would suggest to sisters that they strive to find employment where these issues [the "tricky issues"] are not constant problems for them anyway. I know what it is like to go for months on end without work, because I won't remove my hijab to find work, but I had to trust in Allah. To that end, I would say, make your best of intentions for the pleasure of Allah and then ask Him daily for the strength and wisdom to make the best choices and to recognize the opportunity He will provide you to obtain the position you need.

Aaminah, Business Administrator (non-profit sector)

➡ I would like sisters to excel in whatever talents Allah has given them. This will enrich their lives and the world around them. Also an educated mother is better than an ignorant one. Education is something every Muslimah deserves and is the best way to worship Allah – using their intelligence!

... I believe we all need to express ourselves through the talents Allah has given us. This leads to emotional health and wellbeing. When we do something productive in the world or in our world we feel useful and functional. This includes homemakers and stay-home moms – these are all talents and all of us do not share the same talents!

Huma, Research Coordinator/Senior Research Associate

Updates

Life has a way of moving on. My survey of working Muslimahs can be regarded simply as a "snapshot" of what those women were doing at the time I happened to contact them for my survey. For some of the sisters, there have been changes in their lives since then, in their families, their location or their work. Several sisters offered updates which illustrate how working Muslimahs move on and make progress.

Patricia

has continued with her writing career and has diversified into the realm of Search Engine Optimizing (SEO). She has three books in print and more in the pipeline in sha Allah.

Jasminka

"I have no updates to report, although I am always thinking of a career change, to enable me to spend more time with my kids and feel less stressed overall. My reason for considering a change is that I work in a highly stressful, demanding field and I am feeling increasingly overburdened and unable to adequately fulfill both my duties at work and my responsibilities at home. I would like to have more time with the kids. You know, the usual reasons! I'm not at all set on any other career as yet. Just exploring my options. But as of now, the grind continues..."

Naheed

"I'm at a point skills-wise or in terms of the volume of work to warrant getting my own home-based editing system. I've invested about \$600 in some basic digital recording equipment because whilst CBC let me borrow theirs, I had

to wait around to get it and had to return it quickly because it's all shared. I found it was difficult to coordinate all that picking and dropping, because I'd have to go downtown and take the kids or get someone else to pick them up, etc. I live in -----, so it takes about 1 hour and 45 minutes to get downtown by [local transit]. It was becoming really hard.

"I went to Kashmir for almost a month in January [2006] to cover the post-earthquake situation. I produced a bunch of features for different broadcasters including the CBC. I left the kids back home to be watched after by their dad and my mom. Alhamdulillah things went well and the family was good too. It was a big step for me work-wise and the experience was really amazing."

Fatma

"Since you last heard from me, Hijabpins Canada (hijabpins.ca) continues to be successful, mashaAllah, I have managed to hire an employee. I actually have someone on payroll! It is amazing how things have continued an uphill climb. I was unable to keep up with all the paperwork and still dedicate the time I wanted to dedicate to my children's education - and since this was the reason behind the establishment of my small business, I thought it was time to let someone else in on the action.

"Homeschooling has been taking much more of my time and we have been spending many more hours at the library to get away from the busy phone and business. We go to the library 3-4 days a week for about 3-4 hours a day. I can't feed [my children] enough information!

"Alhamdulillah, [my new business] Urban Muslim has grown from my frustration of not being able to find clothing that is trendy, yet Islamically acceptable. I also have two girls as you know and I am hoping that I will be able to slowly grow this business into something for the younger Muslimahs as well. All in good time, InshaAllah.

"Aside from all that, I have taken on another day at the clinic, working on Wednesdays and Saturdays now. I am hoping to hold on to my skill, so that I may one day open my own dental health clinic or spa for the sisters."

Omayya

Reports that she got a promotion to become a Program Manager, which is a big step up on the corporate ladder.

Rabia

In addition to continuing to build her DiversityworX consultation business and her grassroots work bringing Muslim women and youth together through sports and social activities, Rabia has also been involved in the establishment of the Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities (CAMD). Rabia says:

"Launching CAMD was a dream of bridging my work in the mainstream with the Muslim community. We received exceptional support in principle from the community. As spokesperson and now executive director (without the salary of course), I have been able to channel my passion for advocacy for the inclusion of people with disabilities within the Muslim community. This dialogue that we began almost 2 years ago has created a global conversation and has brought high profile names on board as advisors for CAMD. CAMD's report, *Towards An Inclusive Ummah: Muslims with Disabilities Speak Out*, was the first type of research document to articulate the issues that we as Muslims with disabilities were facing.

"In 2007, a funny thing happened. I personally received some recognition by the Muslim community through a Leadership Award from the Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals (CAMP Toronto) and a Women Who Inspire Award from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW). I guess people felt that because I was blind

and doing all sorts of stuff I deserved to be recognized.

"Then, another funny thing happened. I received a last minute call on the afternoon of the RIS [Reviving the Islamic Spirit] conference on Fri. Dec. 28, 2007 to speak as a local woman involved in social issues in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. Apparently, the scholars on the opening panel of the conference were all male and mostly from the US. They needed a female, especially in light of the domestic violence case²⁸ that received international attention, to provide a local overview. Anything to plug CAMD, so I agreed to go if they provided me with transportation. I realized later that I spoke to over 7,000 members of the audience with the top crew of sheikhs in North America. And so the speaker circuit began.

"Alhamdulillah, 2007 was my year in the media and on stage."

Pamela

"I resigned from my fundraising position to pursue a freelance career in writing and editing. I contribute regularly to a number of news services, as well as working as an editor for Muslim Writers Publishing, a small press run by Linda (Widad) Delgado. I've edited her four young adult books, as well as two novels for adults by Jamilah Kolocotronis, *Echoes* and *Rebounding*."

Pamela is also currently the Director of the Islamic Writers Alliance which is a professional organization for Muslim women writers in all genres.

(www.islamicwritersalliance.net)

Furkan

Is moving to the U.S. to join her husband.

"I am going to get back to building my dental career, from where I left it. I am going to apply to dental schools to pursue an American dental degree and by doing so, I am

going to be a licensed dentist and can start my specialty training."

Sara

"I am still writing. Depending on my mood I write fiction, which comes to me more easily, or a factual work which needs more concentration. I enjoy the fiction writing more but I consider factual and practical writing more of a priority as regards getting it to readers because of the Islamic idea of useful knowledge. My novels are more directed to a non-Muslim readership and I see them as a sign post towards what I believe. Many non Muslims shy away from overtly religious books or factual books on Islam seeing them as not intended for them so I try to set up some sign posts towards the message of Islam in the context of a novel.

"I have [also] been involved with La Leche League which is a breastfeeding charity with members worldwide. They have very good information about continuing to breastfeed if you have to work outside the home which might be of interest for your readers."

Erica

Erica's family has decided to move overseas and her husband has gone ahead to make preparations for the family to follow. This has led to a temporary reduction in family income, and Erica has now found work in her former field of graphic design which is enabling her to update her skills whilst also contributing to the family income. Erica points out that this "stresses the importance of the sisters having a possible trade or career to fall back on in case the need arises."

Noor

"Well, we moved family and business (Noorart) to Dallas, Texas - actually for the sake of an Islamic School that goes

pre-school right thru high school (for our son) and a very active and diverse Muslim community in Dallas.

"Since returning to the States I've been able to fulfill my heart's desire with Allah's will to be active in the masjid, my son's school and many da'wah centered activities in the area. We will be releasing our sixth audio album, *Qur'an for Little Muslims Volume 3*, later this month, insha'Allah, and hope to complete work on our 1st video production this summer - an animated storybook about the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)."

Jennifer

"My working story is one of a constant push/pull with academia. When we last met I had decided to leave academia and pursue a career in community development. But that decision was based mostly on money and the difficulties inherent in getting tenure, not on a decision related to academia per se. So I found that after a year-and-a-half at community development, where I was paid to do what I had always done as a volunteer, that I missed the teaching/research/intellectual environment of academia. I had the opportunity to teach 1 course as a sessional lecturer, so I accepted. "I then juggled 3 part-time jobs. It was WAY too much for me to handle, especially considering that I have had another child since you interviewed me!

"I found that I loved the teaching, but the pay as a sessional lecturer is shockingly low. So I feel that I am back again, unable to make a decision about what my future path should be. I am on maternity leave from my community job, so I have a bit of time to think if I should forego academia again, and go back to the community job, or forego the job security/pay and try and publish and search more seriously for tenure-track academic jobs. The latter do exist, it's just that now I have such little children, it's not the right time I think for a full-time job - anywhere!

"So, in sum, I am still at a crossroads, but I have had a good opportunity to understand each path from many different angles.

"Right now I plan to scale back, try and work from home and spend more time with my little kids and getting the house in order. Inshallah."

Appendices

Important disclaimer:

Not all the resources mentioned in the following sections come from Islamic sources. Some are from “mainstream” western sources in Canada, the US and the UK. As such, the content will not be “100 percent certifiably halal”. But I believe that we can glean useful knowledge and information from many sources. The fact that I mention a book, magazine, website or other resource here does not necessarily mean that I endorse its content fully and unreservedly. I trust that readers can sort the wheat from the chaff by themselves.

Resources on careers and work

Cool Careers for Girls Books

In a series of 13 books, authors Ceel Pasternak and Linda Thornburg explore career ideas for girls in a number of fields, including computers, health, law, animals and food, based on interviews with women who are actually working in the careers in question. They include a "personality checklist" for each job, the skills and physical demands required, and how to balance work with other areas of life.
<http://www.coolcareersforgirls.com/coolcareers.htm>

Muslim Girls' Career Pack

A UK initiative published jointly by the CfBT and Canterbury Christ Church University College. Designed for use with female Muslim students in the UK school system, it may also be a useful resource for community groups. It includes lesson plans to enable Muslim girls to think of what career areas they are interested in, and provides brief biographies, accompanied by photos, of working Muslim women.

Settlement.org

This website for newcomers to Ontario has a section on Employment. A related site, Settlement.org at Work (<http://atwork.settlement.org>), has links to the "No Hijab Is Permitted Here" study and a section on "Best Workplace Policies and Practices: Accommodating the Workplace Needs of Muslim Women Wearing Hijab."

http://atwork.settlement.org/downloads/No_Hijab_Is_Permitted_Here.pdf

Company of Women

A working women's networking organization based in the Toronto area, but with plans to develop chapters in other Canadian cities and further afield. Members are businesswomen and entrepreneurs. Company of Women has also produced a book entitled *The Courage to Succeed: Inspiring Stories from Enterprising Women*.

www.companyofwomen.ca

Milton Keynes Women and Work Group

A local UK organization which helps women to enter the workforce, offering training courses, advice and more. The website has links to other useful sites.

<http://www.womenandwork.co.uk>

Women's Work

A website for working women who are interested in flexible careers that will fit in with family commitments, including starting one's own business:

www.wwork.com

9to5: National Association of Working Women

A US organization that deals with women's issues in the workplace: "9to5's constituents are low-wage women, women in traditionally female jobs, and those who've experienced any form of discrimination".

www.9to5.org

La Leche League

An international organization that promotes breastfeeding and offers support to women who want to breastfeed – including women who go back to work after the baby is born. For sisters who find themselves in this position, La Leche League offers information and support, and has recently published a book on the subject:

*Hirkani's Daughters: Women Who Scale Modern Mountains to
Combine Breastfeeding and Working*
Compiled and Edited by: Jennifer Hicks

International site: www.lalecheleague.org

Canada: <http://www.lalecheleaguecanada.ca>

USA: <http://www.llusa.org>

UK: <http://www.laleche.org.uk>

**Resources for time management,
organization, decluttering, cleaning, and
other juggling skills mentioned in the book**

Websites

Flylady Website

Marla Cilley (known as the "Flylady", a nickname derived from her hobby of fly fishing) has an extensive website dealing with issues of decluttering and organizing one's home, developing routines for chores, etc. You can sign up for regular reminders by e-mail, or use the information given on her website or in her book (listed below).

www.flylady.net

Organized Home Website

Another top-ranked home organization site, run by Cynthia Ewer, who has also published a book, *Houseworks: Cut the Clutter, Speed Your Cleaning and Calm the Chaos*. The site contains articles on decluttering and organizing. There is also a discussion board which may be a source of ideas for getting more organized.

www.organizedhome.com

Don Aslett—cleaning expert

"America's #1 Cleaning Expert", Don Aslett started a cleaning business to earn his way through college. He has written over 40 books on cleaning, decluttering and home maintenance, and has his own range of cleaning products too. www.donaslett.com

Books

ASLETT, Don. *Is there Life After Housework?*

CILLEY, Marla ("The Flylady"). *Sink Reflections*. Bantam Books, New York, 2002.

EWER, Cynthia Townley. *Houseworks: Cut the Clutter, Speed Your Cleaning and Calm the Chaos*. DK Adult, 2006.

MORGENSTERN, Julie. *Organizing from the Inside Out*. Henry Holt and Company, New York, NY, 1998.

-----, *Time Management from the Inside Out*. Owl Books, New York, 2004.

OBERLIN, Loriann Hoff, *Working at Home While the Kids are There, Too*. Career Press, Franklin Lakes, NJ. 1997.

Magazines

Most women's magazines nowadays contain information on various aspects of running a home, and many feature articles on working women and their achievements.

One magazine which is addressed specifically to women who are juggling work and responsibilities in the home is *Working Mother* magazine, a print magazine published in the US which also has an informative website.

www.workingmother.com

A webzine from the UK, **mother@work**, also contains information for working mothers and inspiring stories of working women.

<http://www.motheratwork.co.uk>

APPENDIX C

Services and products offered by women mentioned in the book

Patricia Skinner

Patricia has a number of books to her credit:

1. *Jordan*, for the Countries of the World series, published by Gareth Stevens, 2003. ISBN 0836823656
2. *Syria* for the Countries of the World series, published by Gareth Stevens, 2003. ISBN 0836831187
3. *Islam the Facts: An Account of What Muslims Really Think and Feel*. Available online at www.lulu.com/skinner

Patricia's two work-related websites can be found at:

<http://www.wellwrittenwords.com>

<http://www.blog.marketmou.com>

Sara

Sara has also had two books published:

1. *From Utah to Eternity* by Sarah Louise Baker
Sakinah Books-3 Galpin Close Oxford OX4 1PR
an imprint of the Muslim Academic Trust. Editor Abdul
Hakim Murad/Winter: Cambridge
ISBN-0953805654
0953805646 (cloth)
2. *The Experience of Hijab* by Sara Harold
Al Falah Foundation
Cairo, Egypt
www.falahonline.com

Nimat Marie

Mother's Wit: A Muslim Woman from America Speaks Out by Ni'mat Marie

Published by US-based Author House

www.authorhouse.com

Fatma

Fatma has two websites featuring her hijab pins and clothing businesses:

www.hijabpins.ca

www.urbanmuslim.ca

Munira

Munira's delightful collection of leather goods can be seen at

www.munira.net

Rabia

For more information on Rabia's consultancy company diversityworX, which is aimed at promoting diversity in the workplace and the community, visit:

www.diversityworx.com

For more information on the Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities, visit:

www.camd.ca

Noor

Noor's website selling Islamic media can be found at:

www.noorart.com

Rosie

New Muslim Women's Group, Manchester, UK

Rosie is the contact person for a study group in the Didsbury area which welcomes new Muslims and women who are

interested in Islam. Details are as follows:

Sundays 1pm – 3pm

Didsbury Mosque, Burton Road, West Didsbury,
Manchester, UK

didsbury.newmuslims@ntlworld.com

Aaminah

Aaminah's blog may be found at:

<http://aaminahhernandez.wordpress.com/>

Aaminah is a regular contributor to another blog, Grateful
To Allah:

<http://gratefultoallah.wordpress.com>

At home, at work and beyond - skills that Muslim girls and women need

There are a number of skills and knowledge that I believe every Muslim woman needs to have, whatever her aspirations in life, whether she wants to be a stay-at-home wife and mother and/or a working woman. We should all strive to acquire and improve on the following list:

- 1- **Islamic knowledge.** Know your deen – the basic beliefs and teachings, Tawheed, and the bare minimum you need to know to live as a Muslim, which includes purification (wudoo' and ghushl, and issues with regard to menstruation), prayer and fasting. We also need to know basic teachings on halal and haram, free mixing etc which will help us to decide what career choices are appropriate for us.
- 2- **Functional literacy.** This should be the minimum for all women (and men too of course). This enables us to read the ingredients on food packaging and to follow the instructions on a prescription, among other practical considerations.
- 3- **Nutrition and cooking.** Cooking usually falls to the women – we need to know how to provide our families and ourselves with healthy food and a balanced diet. This is especially important nowadays with the high rate of obesity, diabetes and other food-related diseases in our communities.

- 4- **Food handling and storage.** Connected to the above, knowing how to handle and store food will help avoid disease and stomach upsets, as well as the waste that occurs when food spoils or becomes infested.
- 5- **Cleaning and home maintenance.** Cleaning and housework is usually the woman's job, whatever we may think of that. We don't have to do it like our mothers and grandmothers did; we can look for faster and more efficient tools and methods, which is especially important for women who are working. Home maintenance often falls to women's lot as well, especially in western countries, and there is a lot of satisfaction to be gained, and money to be saved, from wielding a screwdriver or hammer or paintbrush.
- 6- **Money handling skills.** Don't assume that your father or husband will always be there to take care of it for you. Women are allowed to have and handle their own wealth in Islam, a right that was given to us 1400 years ago, long before any other system or culture. If this is a skill that doesn't come naturally, take time to learn.
- 7- **Organization and time management.** In an increasingly hectic world, we need to learn to make the most of our time, and help other family members to do likewise. Time is at a premium for the working woman, so the more skills we can acquire in this area, the better.
- 8- **Research skills.** We often need to find out things for ourselves, whether it is where the best shops are and

where bargains are to be found, or where the best neighbourhoods and schools are, and so on. Those of us with children can set the example of research skills. It's not just about books and directories; research also means using the internet, going to the local library and finding the right people to ask. Finding out which job or career to pursue, or how to start up a business, also requires research skills.

- 9- **Self defence.** It can be a dangerous world out there, no matter where you live. We should not be paranoid and let fear dominate our lives. But we should be practical and realistic, and be prepared to defend ourselves if necessary. Those who are so inclined may take martial arts classes and learn other skills. For the less athletic among us, Wen-do is a simple and effective method of self-defence that can be taught to everyone from first graders to grandmas. See www.wendo.ca for more information. Martial arts teachers also sometimes offer self-defence classes aimed at teaching simple techniques that can be used by anyone, not just black-belts; look out for such opportunities in your area, or why not contact a martial arts school and see if you can organize such an event for women in your community with a female instructor? Practical, common-sense measures that anyone may learn include being aware of one's surroundings at all times, keeping doors and windows locked when at home alone, and not taking foolish risks such as walking alone after dark.
- 10- **Driving and navigation.** Driving is a basic skill that relieves one of dependency on public transit and taxis, and enable women to go about their needs

with relative ease, whether it is travelling to work or school or taking sick children or other loved ones to doctor's appointments and the like. The related skills of navigation and developing a sense of direction are also important.

11- Languages. At the very least, attain proficiency in your own language and the language of the country where you live, if it is different. If Arabic isn't one of these, then make time to learn it too, for it is the language of Islam.

12- First Aid. Everyone should know some basics of first aid – it may be a family member that they save, but the ability to help anyone caught in an accident or other emergency is a true gift.

There are other skills which are worth considering too. Not everyone will have the aptitude or inclination for them, but for those who can master them to some degree, they will save money and may even offer a means of making money if you decide to go into business and sell what you produce with these skills.

1- Sewing – clothes and/or household items. This can save money and offer more choices, especially for those who are taller or larger than the average. In some cases it may be the only way to get decent, modest clothes, for those who live in places where sources of Islamic and modest clothes are few and the malls are full of skimpy fashions. Curtains, cushions and the like can be very expensive – learning how to make them yourself can save a lot of money.

- 2- **Growing stuff.** For those with green thumbs (or green fingers in the UK), gardening is a source of great pleasure and an opportunity to ponder the splendours of Allah's creation. The creation of delightful gardens was close to the heart of many Muslims in history – think of the gardens of Alhambra in Spain. Growing vegetables, herbs and fruits is a way to provide fresh produce for your family, and if you follow organic principles it may reduce the toxins that you are ingesting.

Never too late to learn

You may look at this list and feel that you “missed the boat” if you did not learn these things in school or during childhood, or when you were still young. But it is never too late to learn. In my book *Bent Rib* I wrote about a Muslim woman who grew up in the UK but did not attend school because her parents didn't believe that girls needed to be educated; at the time when I met her, she was attending adult literacy classes and catching up on what she had missed out on. There are classes in Islamic knowledge and study circles organized by mosques in most major cities, and the Internet offers other options for learning (Islamic Open University, Sunni Path, etc). Other skills and knowledge can be acquired via books, adult education classes, programs for women who want to enter the workplace, asking someone to teach you (this is often effective with cooking, crafts and gardening, which enthusiasts love to share), seeking a mentor, and so on.

What we need more of

Just in case the working experiences described in the book aren't enough, here are some more ideas to consider.

From my own experiences and those of sisters I have known over the years, there are certain areas where I am sure Muslim women would make a difference. In Muslim-majority countries many of these are undoubtedly already an everyday occurrence, but for Muslim women in the west and living as a minority, we certainly need more of the following:

- **Architects** who can design practical yet beautiful homes and other buildings, including mosques that are accessible to all with properly defined and adequate women's spaces
- **Hairdressers** who understand what hijab really means (and that the woman who wants her hair cut in the back room does not want it washed in the main salon in full view of everyone!).
- **Clothes designers** who cater for all shapes and sizes and/or who use natural or blended fabrics (spare us from the polyester plague!).
- **Personal trainers/fitness experts** who can help the flabby ummah get fit.
- **Financial advisers** who can help us find halal financial products and guide us through the money maze
- **Counsellors** who really understand where Muslim women are coming from
- **Mental health nurses** – ditto

- **Taxi-drivers** (a woman-only local service would be a boon for many, not just Muslim women)
- **Nutritionists** who can help us make wise food choices whilst also avoiding haram ingredients

Endnotes

1. The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study which surveyed over 31,500 employees in 100 public, private and not-for-profit organizations, in which at least 500 employees worked. See Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins, *The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study: Report One* (2002) and *Work-Life Conflict in Canada the New Millennium: A Status Report* (2003).
http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/awlb/04canadian_response.shtml
2. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/awlb/02introduction.shtml>
3. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/awlb/04canadian_response.shtml
4. Duxbury and Chris Higgins. 2001. *Work-life balance in the New Millenium: where are we? Where do we need to go?*: Canadian Policy Research Network,
<http://www.cwhn.ca/resources/workplace/family.html#11>
5. <http://www.hecol.ualberta.ca/Courses/2007%20Winter/HECOL550/%5B%20Presentations%20%5D%20Improving-work-life-balance,%20other%20countries.pdf>
6. *The Women of Madina*, Muhammad ibn Sa'd, p. 10
7. *Taareekh al-Islam, 'Ahd al-Khulafa' al-Raashideen*, p. 298, 299 – quoted in *'Umar ibn al-Khattaab – his Life and Times* by Dr. Ali Muhammad Sallaabi, vol. 1, p. 270
8. *Women of Madina* p. 216
9. *Women of Madina*, p. 209
10. *Women of Madina*, p. 314
11. *Saheeh Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1190-1191
12. *Saheeh Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 774
13. *Saheeh al-Bukhaari*, vol. 2, p. 29
14. *The Life of Muhammad*, A. Guillaume, p. 463
15. *al-Bidaayah wa'l-Nihaayah*, 7/140, quoted in *'Umar ibn al-Khattab*, Ch 3

16. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

17. *Saheeh Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1309

18. Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Women Scholars of Hadeeth*.

<http://www.jannah.org/sisters/womenhadith.html>

19. Carla Power, "A Secret History", *New York Times*, February 25, 2007

20. Although there may seem to be some repetition and overlap in this list, it was interesting to see the variety in responses and I have chosen to leave the descriptions as the women themselves gave them, rather than group them into similar categories.

21. Mira lives in Canada but her comments are applicable to any country with an immigrant Muslim population, such as Great Britain, the United States, and so on.

22. The issue of intra-community racism is one that is beyond the scope of this book, but is one that needs to be tackled head-on by the ummah, especially minority communities in western countries that are composed of immigrants from varied backgrounds and local converts (and their children).

23. "No Hijab Is Permitted Here" – *A Study on the Experiences of Muslim Women Wearing Hijab Applying for Work in the Manufacturing, Sales and Service Sectors*. Judy Vashti Persad and Salome Lukas. *Women Working with Immigrant Women*, Toronto, 2002.

24. It is permissible to join together Zuhr and 'Asr, and Maghrib and 'Isha', at the time of either prayer, in cases of necessity. However, the prayers may not be shortened except when one is travelling.

25. "Secret Santa" is a Western custom whereby a group of friends or colleagues agree that each person will buy one gift of a set value agreed upon by the group. The gifts are then allocated by means of a draw, so each person gets a gift but does not necessarily know who the giver is. The

idea is that all members of the group get to participate in giving and receiving gifts, thus reinforcing bonds among the group, without the expense of each person buying a gift for every other person.

26. Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1393; Muslim, 80.

27. These are Arabic dishes that are typically labour-intensive and time-consuming to prepare, hence the appeal of buying them ready-made from a restaurant!

28. This is a reference to the case in the Toronto area in which a teenage Muslim girl, Aqsa Parvez, was allegedly killed by her father, which was making headlines around the world at the time (December 2007).

16. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

17. *Saheeh Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1309

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Can a Muslim woman have a role beyond the domestic realm?

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Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. ”

Huda Khattab is a British-born Canadian Muslim writer. She is the author of The Muslim Woman's Handbook, Bent Rib and Stories from the Muslim World. Born into a Christian family of Scottish/English origin, she has been a Muslim since 1983. Huda Khattab lives with her husband and children near Toronto, Canada.